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*The* CLUTCH *of*  
CIRCUMSTANCE

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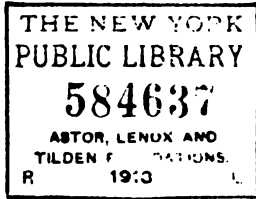
*By*  
JAMES BARNES

Author of  
"Outside the Law"



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NEW YORK  
1908



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*Published April, 1908*

1908  
1908  
1908



TO SOMEONE  
TO WHOM I TOLD THIS STORY LONG AGO  
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

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# THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

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## CHAPTER I

### THE REUNION

**I** CONFESS you surprised me. But I see how it is—the big cities no longer tempt you,” observed the Rev. Franklin Bellwood, glancing out of the window as he toyed with the worn string of his eyeglasses. Then, abruptly and somewhat absently, he added: “My! but it is hot to-day! Eh? Very close and hot!”

The little front garden back of the evergreens exhaled a moist fragrance—bees hummed everywhere. The sunlight was sifting through the vines into the rectory study, scents of box hedge and honeysuckle mingling with the odors of old books and tobacco smoke.

“Well, the cities didn’t tempt you when you became a country parson,” returned the occupant of the armchair, ignoring the reference to the weather, “and you see a doctor has an advantage, in a place where he enjoys a fairly good reputation to begin with. Besides,” he continued, pausing an instant thoughtfully, “you know my position, Frank; it isn’t money that I am after—only a chance to settle down in a place where I hope to be contented and incidentally, perhaps, to be useful. I’ve had enough of big cities!”

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

The minister, who had turned to the window once more, half rose suddenly and sat down again. Throughout the interview he had shown signs of extreme nervousness. Two or three times his friend had looked at him with the quick glance of the physician who is making a clandestine diagnosis of a patient's condition. Now, as there was no reply, he put his train of thought into words.

"Frank," he went on, "you've been working too hard—I know you like a book—you keep things too close to you. You should let go now and then. How many times I longed to have you with me in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, or London! The old firm together: 'Bellwood & Kellogg'! Remember when we burned our names into the door at college?"

"I remember that you did and paid all damages," responded the minister with an attempted smile.

"Rather a neat job; I was quite proud of it! It seems long ago that we parted company, doesn't it?"

"Twelve years ago—this June."

Lawrence Kellogg half echoed the other's sigh. Then he brightened, in an effort to lessen the very evident constraint.

"Do you recollect the long arguments we used to have?—especially the one in which we nearly came to blows, because I said Brimfield was a stupid hole of a place, only fit for clergymen, old maids, and collectors of beetles?"

"Yes, I think I do. You've changed your opinion in a measure, now, haven't you?"

"Rather! People over there began taking me for an Englishman, and I thought it about time to return to 'My country, 'tis of thee!' I cleared out without

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saying 'good-by' to a soul—I suppose they think I've gone to Thibet again. But I needed rest. I've a book in my mind, mistily, too. Here would be a good place to do it."

"You felt that you had a 'call'—is that it?"

"Exactly—no joking; you've hit it! And talking of that—do you remember another argument we once had upon the 'Calls of Conscience'—the year of our graduation? How eloquent you grew when Sprague defined conscience as 'mental indigestion'! I'll bet you made a sermon of it."

The Reverend Bellwood lifted his eyebrows and shot a glance at his friend, uncertain at first if he was chaffing or serious.

"Come now, didn't you?"

"Let me think; perhaps I may have."

"Same old Frank! Direct questions are a bother! But now, more quizzing: My arrival was rather a surprise, eh? Don't blame you for thinking I'd never come back. I suppose people here have forgotten me; but I intend to open up my father's house at the corner—it's kept in good repair; old Mary and her daughter have lived in the kitchen wing. Then I'll get an office somewhere and hang out my shingle. I can scarcely believe that I have been but six hours in the town. There has been a lot of building. The new church, near the station, they tell me, is yours. You've done good work here, Frank, haven't you?"

"I fear I've done very little. We finished the church last fall; there's still a mortgage on it." In the reply there dwelt a slight note of uneasiness.

"Well, as I intend to become a member of your congregation, you might let me——"

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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“No! no!” came the interruption quickly. “You have always done too much for me, Lawrence. I owe you a great deal now—more than I can ever repay! You are the one person in the world I cannot take it from. Please, please do not; I ask you!” He raised his hand in a gesture of protest.

“Nonsense, nonsense; don’t talk like that, old chap! I won’t have it! You know, you never owed me anything.”

The minister carefully arranged the papers on the desk at his elbow.

“It isn’t nonsense,” he replied. “I don’t want you to think I’ve forgotten, that’s all. . . . I could never have gone through ‘The Divinity’ if it had not been for you. Then you remember how it was at college; and there are lots of things besides.”

“Now, my dear Frank—” began his companion deprecatingly, and then he stopped.

For a moment there was silence. Despite Kellogg’s attempt to rough it off, there was, underlying their talk so far, a vague feeling of being, as it were, on guard. Their first greeting and hand clasp had been followed by that strangeness of manner that comes, not infrequently, to old friends who have gone divers ways, to meet long afterwards. Evidently, also, both were avoiding a subject that sooner or later they must touch upon. Each was waiting for the other to begin.

It was the minister who did so.

“Amy should be in now, presently. I can’t imagine what keeps her so long,” he said, straightening the papers with the ivory ruler. “She took the children down to their grandmother’s for the afternoon. You will stay to tea, won’t you?”

## THE REUNION

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"It's very good of you, but I'm afraid I can't wait much longer"—this with a responsive accent of formality. "I promised Judge Hollins to meet him at the hotel—I am stopping there, you know, till I get matters settled. He has had charge of all my affairs here. . . . You said 'children' just now, Frank; there are two of them, aren't there?"

"Yes, a boy and a girl—didn't Amy write you? I've been a bad correspondent; I am more than ashamed."

He looked up appealingly, drew a long breath, and began again to fumble with the glasses on his worn, clerical waistcoat.

"We've both been very bad correspondents; let it drop at that," Kellogg replied.

There was another pause. Not a line had he received in the last ten years from Amy Bellwood, except the strangely short and strangely worded note announcing her approaching marriage, and one of thanks for his wedding present. Several of his epistles antedating this had remained unanswered. Why had she not explained some things he had asked her? He had felt cruelly hurt and disappointed and, in regard to some happenings, utterly at loss to understand. In Bellwood's letters, subsequent to his marriage, he had made but little reference to his wife and few to his family affairs, until, as such things happen, the correspondence had practically ceased. For five years, at least, no word had been exchanged.

Kellogg began to wonder if Amy had grown into a settled, matronly person, suited to the home of a minister with a small and struggling congregation. He recalled her ambitions, her wide viewpoints, and

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her love of living. She had a soul above sewing circles and a mind above mission boxes. He had always thought of her as being capable of great things. He smiled slowly to himself as he recalled their boy and girl affection—for he endeavored thus to look at it. Bellwood, of course, had known. It seemed very long ago; but, nevertheless, for some reason, Kellogg's heart beat a little faster at the recollection. He was to have returned—surely he would have returned—and they were to be free, absolutely free in the mean time. That was the compact between them.

Their youthful wisdom, apparently, had been well borne out—she had decided for herself; there had been no ground for reproaches. He still possessed a bundle of letters she had written him during the first months of his sojourn in Berlin and Vienna before the sudden announcement of her engagement to the present rector of St. John's. He closed his mind to the retrospect. He would keep the letters no longer.

To break the uncomfortable silence he inquired casually about some of the townfolk; the intent was obvious.

As the minister was about to reply, there came the sound of children's voices from the vine-covered veranda. Kellogg rose at once. Bellwood crossed quickly to the door.

"I'd better tell her you are here," he said, speaking in a whisper. "It would be better, perhaps, eh?"

He paused irresolutely, with his hand on the knob.

Kellogg, half smiling, nodded, and stood waiting by the desk as Bellwood stepped into the hall.

The doctor looked about him. Everywhere else in the house was the exacting threadbare neatness with

## THE REUNION

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which pride covers the borders of poverty. But here how well he remembered everything!—the rows of old, ragged-backed books that Frank had inherited, with his calling, from his father, the worn leather chairs, the hanging lamp, the disreputable stuffed owl that had now lost an eye and looked more disreputable than ever, the mantelpiece crowded with odds and ends of old china and faded photographs, reminiscent of college years and bygone memories.

Something, very foreign to the rest of the surroundings, forcibly intruded itself: a toy horse peeped from under the frayed edges of the window curtain, and a work basket full of unfinished sewing was on the table. He pulled himself together as the door opened.

“Amy, you have not forgotten—” began Bellwood’s voice, with an attempt at cheeriness. And then she came into the room.

No, he had not misjudged her; he saw that at a glance—she was capable of great things! But in that glance, even before she spoke, he saw much else. She had changed but little and yet a great deal, inscrutably. She was not matronly; in fact, if anything, she was slenderer, she was more beautiful; but the essence of her, the spirit, had altered. Her face was not care-worn or lined; it was slightly flushed and very girlish now, as she advanced toward him with her hand outstretched. But the tangle of brown hair, that had been so gloriously wayward, was drawn back closer on the temples; the gray eyes had grown steady, they danced no longer. Something surged up in his heart as she drew nearer—it disconcerted him.

“Forgotten!” she exclaimed. “Frank must be taking leave of his senses! So you’ve come back to us!



## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Who was it?—somebody was speaking of you the other day, and we were wondering—” She paused and looked back at the doorway where her husband was still standing.

Beside him, peering shyly into the room, were two children; the elder a boy of six, the younger a little girl of four.

“Come in, come in, young people,” she continued, with the slight amusement young mothers affect when presenting their offspring. “Here’s some one you must know.”

“And some one who wants to know you,” cried Kellogg, bending forward.

It was the first time he had spoken, and the words seemed to afford a relief from the tension he felt he must be showing.

The boy held back, viewing the visitor with steady, observant eyes, one hand clinging to his mother’s skirts; but the girl came to him at once.

Kellogg picked her up in his arms and kissed her almost fiercely. The little one looked at him in bewilderment. Then the boy came forward extending his hand.

“You were always fond of children, weren’t you, Larry?” said Mrs. Bellwood evenly.

It was a grateful shock of further relief to him that she had gone back to using his first name so readily. Woman’s natural gift had come to the rescue of the awkward moment.

“Yes,” he returned, “very, always.”

“Do let us sit down. We have so much to talk about,” she continued, at the same time giving the children a whispered dismissal. The minister edged up

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his chair, his eyes following every expression on his wife's face.

"What are your plans now?" asked Mrs. Bellwood directly, her gray eyes studying Kellogg as if searching for some change in him. "I suppose that you will soon be going off again. You intended to surprise us, didn't you?—perhaps Frank has asked you that very question."

"Yes, he did," returned the doctor. "As to my plans, I'll repeat them: I hope to settle down here—well—for the rest of my life! I'm sending over all my things, even my dog. That ought to show a permanent idea! Of course, I may run away now and then, but I intend to make Brimfield my home."

Unintentionally he had given an emphasis to the end of the sentence. Then he went on and detailed his plans with a volubility that was new to him. He spoke of the longing that had been growing for some time within him, and how, of late, his mind had reverted to the old scenes and surroundings. He described how, at last, this desire, this longing, this "call," had been so strong that he had burned his bridges behind him, giving up the beginnings of a very good practice that he had established in London, and turned his footsteps homeward. Like wandering Ulysses, he had returned to his Ithaca. "Only," he added, in conclusion, "there's no Penelope, and people seem to have gone along very well without me."

There was more desultory talk, more questions and answers; then the guest rose to take his departure. Again he had to refuse the invitation to stay and sup, and Bellwood followed him to the gate of the little front garden. There the two shook hands.

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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“Larry,” said the minister, as if acting upon impulse, “the latchstring is always out for you. You remember how it was when we were boys together—my home is yours.”

“Thanks, old fellow,” returned Kellogg; “you are a very happy man—aren’t you?”

Bellwood flicked a caterpillar from a leaf of the big rosebush. “Happy?—yes,” he replied; “sometimes so much so that—that I wonder if I could have deserved it.”

“There, you see; that introspective conscience of yours bobs up again.” His friend slapped him playfully on the shoulder. “Same old Frank!”

Then, with a laugh and a wave of the hand, he hurried down the street.

As he strode away he was indulging in a little introspection on his own account. As yet he could not analyze his feelings completely. He was almost angry with himself for being disturbed—at least for showing it—upon his meeting with Amy Bellwood. Yet, as he went over all the sensations of the first interview, they occurred again. Even the recollection of the sound of her voice started his heart beating faster. What a wonderful voice she had! So suggestive of all the qualities of expression, and the same old way of looking squarely and deeply into one’s eyes! But she was changed—in what he could not determine, nor did he wish to. Just at that moment he was anxious to shake off his mood, to change the trend of his recollections. He rejoiced when he saw Judge Hollins’s portly figure standing near the veranda of the hotel across the street.

“Well, Lawrence, my boy,” began the old gentleman in his didactic, sonorous voice, “I was saying to

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myself—just saying to myself, as you came along: 'So much like his father, the general'—even the way you walk! Now, I couldn't pay you a higher compliment, could I?"

"No, sir, you couldn't," laughed Kellogg, "and I confess I appreciate it—I mean the flattery of it. . . . Been waiting for me?"

"Yes, my boy; and my appetite's waiting, too."

The judge tucked his arm inside that of the younger man and they entered the hotel. As they seated themselves at the table in the long, bare dining room the proprietor looked in and, seeing them, approached with all the easy familiarity of the country boniface. He leaned with one hand on the judge's chair and one hand on Kellogg's, and wagged his head between them as he spoke.

"I was jes' tellin' the judge, a few minutes ago, that you come back to the right place," he said, addressing the latter part of the sentence to the doctor. "We need a pushing young physician here in this town. Old Doc Rublee's first class, but gettin' old, and—and t'other doctor, Porter, he's a homopath, and folks here, 'spite the fact that we're up to date, is kinder old-fashioned." He changed to somewhat of a mournful tone: "We had a powerful lot of sickness here last fall—kind of a influenzy. Mrs. Slocum and my married daughter was took real bad. They said as how it was an imported disease, the 'Lar Grip,' they called it; but I dognozed it as a sort of contagious cold. I suppose you treated lots of such cases," shifting his hand from the back of Kellogg's chair to his shoulder. "We'll have to get up something more complicated to amuse him, eh, judge?"

...a prodigious return! I guess you  
in' off again!" He laughed and  
's shoulder. "Best way to keep a  
is to marry him down! Ye ain't  
' Again the gentle push, accompan  
wink. "Yes! Seems to me, now, I  
of it."

"No," answered Kellogg tritely, "I'm  
achelor."

"That's the way we all talked once,"  
um. "Hullo! hullo! here comes our u  
er!"

A few shutters banged; there was a  
der and a sudden, pattering downpour

Mr. Slocum rose to the occasion.

"I never see'd such peculiar weather,  
ms to me you can't count on it at a  
mber such——"

Just then somebody called from the do  
a final wag of his head, he departed.

## THE REUNION

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“Yes,” Kellogg nodded, “and I want to ask a few questions. . . . How is he doing?”

“Very well, I should say; very well indeed; preaches most remarkably fine sermons sometimes—wonderful words, beautifully spoken! He gets a good stipend, too, thanks to old Esterbrook’s endowment. But I guess for some reason they’re pretty hard up just now. There was a good lawyer lost when he turned parson—would have made a splendid special pleader! Our friend Ellery here has joined his congregation; goes, all togged up, to St. John’s every Sunday. I went to hear Frank once—I ain’t much of a churchgoer—but he would have had the jury with him, I can tell you that! It was shortly after his marriage to Amy Winter. The subject of the sermon was ‘The Demands of Conscience’ or something of the kind, if I remember rightly.”

Kellogg started slightly, but did not smile.

“Tell me of the Winters,” he said. “I knew the old colonel died very suddenly, soon after I went abroad; I supposed he’d leave the family well to do.”

“Hardly a red cent,” was the return. “Like your good father he didn’t have the proper eye for speculation. To be exact, he left two or three government bonds, a thirty-acre farm, well mortgaged, some debts, and about one hundred and ninety-odd thousand dollars’ worth of stock in a no-good gold mine out West somewhere. No, come to think, down in Mexico; I remember the name now—the ‘El Cintura’; but ’twasn’t worth paper! How he’d have made out if it hadn’t been for his pay as supervisor I don’t know! Mrs. Winter’s got her pension and just about enough

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to scratch along on. Her widowed sister-in-law, Mrs. Blatchford, lives with her; she's librarian now at the Atheneum. Take it the two old ladies have a pretty hard pull at times; Mrs. Winter's been ailing since spring." He paused for a moment and then resumed thoughtfully: "Amy didn't get a penny! Splendid little woman, though, worth her weight in gold, and still the prettiest girl in Brimfield. When she was studying trained nursing up at Antioch, why, Walter Smith and half the young doctors— Do you know, I once thought you——"

His friend did not reply. The judge, who had quick perceptions, changed the subject and soon pushed himself back, brushing the crumbs from the folds of his waistcoat.

"Let's go outside and smoke," he said. "The shower's cooled things off and laid the dust."

Together they went out on the veranda and seated themselves in the polished wooden chairs. There was a refreshing breeze swaying the elm branches overhead, the eaves of the old portico were dripping slow drops into the little pools in the glistening, graveled walks, and somewhere from a garden a thrush was piping blithely. It was peaceful, beautiful, and homelike; and yet Lawrence Kellogg, as he sat there silently smoking, wondered if he had found what he was seeking after all! The judge, who had been watching him, turned suddenly and interrupted his thoughts.

"Larry," he said, "suppose we put off any talk we had for this evening, if it's the same to you. I've got some papers to look over, and we can take things up to-morrow."

"All right, sir; to tell the truth I don't feel much

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like it myself. I've had a long, tiresome journey today."

"Then I'll say good night and leave you. You'll want to turn in early."

"I don't think I will sit up very late, judge. Good night."

They parted with a friendly hand shake, the old gentleman crossing the street to his office, leaving the doctor alone on the veranda. The electric arc lamp that had begun to sputter from its pole in front of the hotel threw its wavering light full upon him, but the brilliant glare did not seem to disturb him in the least.

It was rather a remarkable face, Kellogg's—not handsome, certainly, from a classical standpoint, but full of the latent suggestion of many things. It was the humanity of it that was distinctly appealing: the lurking contradiction of the kindly brow, and the deep-set, keen-sighted eyes—eyes that could be masterful, or soft and humorous. The determined nose and chin belied the curve of the smooth-shaven lips, the restless lips of a man that might be tempted, not easily, but strongly, who would enjoy things to the full—who might, perhaps, enjoy the temptations. Just now the curve was drawn into a straight line over the white, even teeth.

The 'bus, that had gone to the station to meet the ten o'clock train, drew up with a lurch at the portico steps. A few passengers clambered out. The sound of voices and the thumping of baggage disturbed Kellogg's reverie; he rose quickly. Declining Mr. Slocum's invitation to join him and one or two guests at the bar, he climbed the stairs to his room. For a long time after he had gone to bed he tossed uneasily



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—he had not yet adjusted his mental focus to the changes that had occurred. . . . So the Winters had been in dire straits! Amy had studied at the hospital—he had not heard of it. There were lots of threads for him to pick up.

Would he ever be happy here, in Brimfield? Would it not be better to abandon it all now, before he had further committed himself? What strange urging was it that had prompted his impulse to return? Even now, as he thought of the interview with Frank Bellwood and the meeting with his wife, he wondered at the force of his own complex sensations. Again he felt half angry at the effect of Amy Bellwood's presence upon him—that sudden heart gasp that had been so unexpected! And why had she started when he had spoken of being "called"? Those questioning gray eyes, why had they searched him so? Why had he come? But retreat was easy! He could make some plausible explanation for his sudden departure, despite his confident assertions at the rectory. A day or so would suffice for him to arrange any business affairs, and by the end of the week he would be once more on the ocean. The short voyage over, back in London again, he could take up his life where he had left it. He determined finally to put off his decision until the morning, and at last fell into a troubled sleep.

## CHAPTER II

### MISGIVINGS

A VERY modest "shingle" had appeared at the entrance to a little two-story brick structure on Main Street. It announced a name, followed by the usual M.D. and, in numerals, the hours of consultation. It had been there just a week.

In the goodly sized front office on the second floor Lawrence Kellogg sat in a big leather chair near the wide-open window. On the edge of the desk beside him was a large leather portfolio and pile of uncut magazines; a copy of a medical journal lay open on his knee. His strong fingers were clasped across his chest, and his eyes looked blankly out through the elm branches at the clock tower of the new building on the opposite corner of the square. The strident-voiced bell had struck the hour unheeded. The lengthening shadows were creeping over the grass plot about the Soldiers' Monument, trimmed with its little pyramids of shiny black cannon balls, but he still sat there, breathing deep, long breaths.

The retrospect that was apparently so absorbing could hardly have been enjoyable, judging from Kellogg's expression; and his expressions were generally truth-telling. The fact was that he was looking back at the strange mixture he had made of life. He knew

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that the only reason that he had ever accomplished anything—and, by the way, he very much belittled his accomplishments—was because he had never lost belief in his dominant will. He had touched many sides of life—he frankly admitted that he possessed the germs of most human weaknesses—but born in him had been the desire to worship and to serve. The first he had satisfied by a mental obeisance to a somewhat intangible ideal, and the second, increasingly as the years, by seeing the practical results of his work in his profession.

It had been here that he most frequently had been obliged to call upon his will. His interest depended directly upon the seriousness of his task; he greeted difficulties with relief, accepting the trivial with a frank acknowledgment of its boresomeness.

Lawrence Kellogg's inheritance and his early training might, beyond all doubt, have accounted for some of his peculiar contradictions. His grandfather, Amandus Kellogg, whom he just remembered as a strong-willed old man of eighty, had been one of the founders of Brimfield, moving from New England to what was then the almost unpeopled West, early in 1800. He had built the old homestead with its wide-ranging outbuildings that clung to the outskirts of the town; and it was his original holdings there and in the neighboring manufacturing center of Kenton Falls, eight miles below on the river, that had enabled his only son to live his life as it pleased him, and placed his only grandchild, now, if not in the class of the wealthy, at least in the ranks of the independently well to do.

His mother was not even a memory to Lawrence.

## MISGIVINGS

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She had died, alas! when she had presented him to the world. His infancy had been spent among strangers, subject to the mercies and ministrations of nurses and governesses, for his father had taken but little interest in his existence until the boy, who had been born in England, was some seven years of age. It was then Lawrence had returned with his somewhat erratic parent to Brimfield.

His father had always been a puzzle to him from his earliest days; he had had so many interests, so many friends. From a reunion of the Grand Army at Shiloh to a National Committee meeting in Chicago, from the race track at Saratoga to the *salle de jeu* at Monaco, the old veteran had drifted. He had something about him that forestalled familiarity; at the same time he had the gift of progressing socially without effort, and this his son had, in a measure, inherited.

It had been so in college. He had captained both the nine and the eleven with no thought to himself of the unusual honor, and he had spent his large allowance freely with no idea of gaining popularity.

The reason that he had adopted a profession was simple. His father's advice, given but a short time before his death, the boy had worked into what was, more or less, a personal code.

"Larry," the general had said, "you will find plenty of people eager to help you enjoy life; but you will only find happiness in being able to do something worth while, alone and unaided. If, in the doing of it, you can help others, so much the better. Don't make the mistake I did—the war unsettled me at the crucial point of my life. *Be something!*"

"How about medicine?" the boy had asked.

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“Capital,” his father had replied; “only don’t half learn it; promise me—if you undertake it—you’ll put it through.”

And Lawrence Kellogg, from sheer force of determination, had “put it through,” and could look at his work without the shamed feeling of neglected opportunities.

But now, as he sat there thinking, he was forced to the acknowledgment that Amy Winter had played a bigger part in his life than he had ever confessed before. He had tried to reason himself out of this conviction the first night of his home-coming; but it had grown to a certainty. Very often during his unsettled and, at times, rather feverish existence abroad—after his decision to remain there—he had found himself making an involuntary mental comparison between the mere memory of her charm and her personality—this sometimes with a bitter heartlift—and the proximity of a very tangible physical attraction. Yet, since her marriage, he had tried to shut her out of his thoughts. He would not pause to build the what-might-have-been on the foundations of an uncemented tenderness. Nevertheless, his dreams had often brought to him a reality of loss, a loss confirmed in the force of his present and somewhat startling re-awakening.

There was no use in attempting to reason himself out of the situation, however, any more than there was in dwelling on his present mood. *She* would never know—to that he subscribed himself with a firmer pressure of his straight-drawn lips.

He rose from the easy chair and picked up the portfolio. Taking from it a packet of letters he broke

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the string that held them and, going to the fireplace, touched a match to the pile of kindlings.

A drawing, accompanying a banal little poem entitled tritely, "Old Love Letters," that he had seen in a cheap magazine, came to his mind—only these could hardly be called love letters. But the forced smile wasted. He caught a few words in the ink, still visible on a crinkling, blackened sheet that had slipped its envelope; they were the last she had written him preceding her strange silence. "Dear boy: I shall never cease to—" He threw the remaining letters hurriedly into the grate. For some time he stood there looking down at the embers.

"Hullo, Larry; hullo!" cried a voice from behind him suddenly. "A fire! on this warm evening! Well, well! My stars! What ails you—blood thinning?"

"No," replied Lawrence, looking over his shoulder and seeing Judge Hollins standing there, almost filling the doorway. "No fear; just burning some old papers."

"Destroying no evidence, I hope, son?"

"No, judge; hardly."

"Beg pardon; I was only funning. I was about to offer you my legal services at a discount! Once lost a case for a client of mine—'tarnation glad I did, by the way!—and when we left court he said: 'See here, Mister Hollins, they told me you were a big lawyer and a *good* one, and now I know why: you weigh over two hundred pounds and you've never yet been in jail!'"

Lawrence joined belatedly in the judge's laugh—somehow he did not feel in the mood for levity. The old gentleman clapped him on the shoulder.

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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“Come, come! don’t be so serious! She may relent, my boy. You know the old adage——”

But Kellogg had interrupted him, stepping quickly to the window. “Look here, judge!” he said. “You’re just the one to answer a question! Here comes that big car—it’s been going up and down the street all the afternoon—whose is it?”

“Mrs. Ned Rice’s,” the judge rejoined, drawing closer, “and that’s Mrs. Ned in the back, and sitting alongside of her is the derndest skunk in this country—and his name is Wilford Murger, spelt M-u-r-g-e-r.”

“Yes, I’ve heard of him; hopes to be our next district attorney, eh? But tell me about Mrs. Rice—who is she?”

“You remember Rice, who used to own the Upper Falls Mill?”

“Yes, certainly; I thought he was dead.”

“So he is—deader’n a door nail. That’s his widow—people still call her ‘Mrs. Ned.’ She’s a wonder! Take care of yourself, my boy. I’m an old man—Hullo! hullo!”

The big Panhard, in charge of the machinist, had swirled in a circle, and had come to rest with a burbling, choking spasm, immediately beneath the window. A man climbed out of the tonneau and stood talking earnestly with the woman, who, lifting her veil, leaned forward to hear better what he was saying. A laugh, hearty and musical, but a trifle loud, perhaps, suddenly sounded above the slow throbbing of the machine.

“My stars, they hold hands a long time!” observed the judge, with an amused little chuckle. “Our friend, Mr. Murger, is a very favored mortal!”

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Lawrence looked down and perceived that, sure enough, Mrs. Rice's fingers reposed in those of Mr. Murger, or his reposed in hers; which, it was hard to tell. And just then, for some reason, the lady raised her head and saw that she was observed. Lawrence was conscious of a bold pair of eyes and a smile that flashed white teeth, as she recognized the judge. But he made no effort to disengage her hand, and waved the other in an unembarrassed gesture of greeting and invitation above Mr. Murger's shoulder.

"So much for him!" laughed the old gentleman. "That gives him his status—plain as a note from Bradstreet's!" He backed from the window. "I like Mrs. Ned in her way—but I don't like some of her friends," he went on. "She wants us to come down. You'll have to meet her sooner or later; she asked me to bring you to see her. But all I can say is: Be careful!" He shook his head knowingly, with mock seriousness.

"Have no fear for me," returned Lawrence, smiling; and unconsciously his glance strayed to the pathetic little pile of ashes in the grate.

The judge had caught the look and the momentary shadow of a saddened reflection.

"You're in no trouble, Larry boy, are you?" he asked. "No entanglements or anything? Come, now, confess up! My affection for your father and my regard for you may make me seem inquisitive; but believe me——"

Lawrence turned to him smiling.

"No trouble, old friend," he said. "If I ever should have any, you are the one I would come to."

"Don't ever forget that," rejoined the judge.



## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

"And now let's go down and meet the widow—I feel like a recruiting sergeant, 'pon my word I do."

"Well, I don't feel like a raw recruit exactly," returned Lawrence, resting his hand on the judge's shoulder, and with a laugh they went down the steps together.

Mr. Murger had flown by the time they reached the sidewalk; his retreating figure could be seen hurrying swiftly down the street. With a half glance behind him he turned the nearest corner.

Mrs. Rice's greeting was cordial and unaffected. Lawrence was conscious of the very firm pressure of a large and well-formed hand, and a sincerely interested pair of light-blue eyes that gazed, half challenging, into his.

"The judge has told me something about you, Dr. Kellogg," said the widow, her red lips parting in a frankly open smile that showed again her beautiful teeth, "and I really wanted to meet you before you left us for good."

"But I don't intend leaving; I've no such idea."

"If I was a betting man," laughed Mrs. Rice, "I'd lay you two to one that you won't stay here six months."

"And having moral scruples against betting on a certainty, I would refuse to accept any such wager." Kellogg was fully conscious that the bold eyes had taken him in, not unapprovingly, from head to foot.

"We'll compromise," suggested the widow; "I'm going away myself, to be gone two months—a flying trip to Paris. If you are here when I return, you'll have dinner with me."

Much amused, Lawrence thanked the lady with the

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easy gallantry befitting the occasion, but inwardly, for some reason, he congratulated himself that the next meeting was so long postponed.

"I'll keep you to your promise, remember!" smiled Mrs. Rice. "Judge Hollins will tell you that my dinners are not so bad!"

"The best, madam," replied the old lawyer, bowing; "they belong to the 'meals that will be memories.' . . . When are you leaving us?"

"To-morrow afternoon; didn't you observe my affectionate parting from 'the opposition'? Surely you didn't think that, if I was going to see him very soon, I would have been party to such an affecting tableau!—wasn't it heartrending? I won't have anybody to quarrel with now for a long time."

"Is he worth quarreling with?" inquired the judge.

"You seem to have thought so, from what I hear," bantered Mrs. Rice. "At all events, he is such an earnest donkey that he amuses me; he's like a pet vice that we haven't learned to like and don't approve of, but hate to give up altogether."

"You should join the Reformers, my dear madam!"

"I hope you are speaking politically, judge. You know I belong to the 'Spiritual Independents'—wasn't that what we agreed to call it? Don't compromise me before Dr. Kellogg, please, please!"

Mrs. Rice laid her gloved hand on Lawrence's arm, with more of a touch of good-comradeship than coquetry, and turned to him.

"I must be off," she said. "If you are in Paris during the next six weeks look me up at the Ritz. If not, dine with me when I come back. Good-by."

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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She spoke a word to the man at the wheel of the huge car, and in another minute was speeding up the street waving a farewell through the dust, to which the judge responded with a flourish of his black slouch hat.

“Mrs. Ned has mighty little of the ‘spiritual’ and a good deal of the ‘independent’ about her,” commented the old gentleman at last. “She is most naturally and charmingly earthly; and I dare say she might be—er—contagiously unconventional. What do you think of her?”

Kellogg replied nothing just then; but as they strolled down the street, he asked a question.

“Has Mrs. Rice any children, judge?”

“One daughter about fifteen—goes to school in New York—seldom or never comes here. . . . How old should you suppose Mrs. Ned to be?”

“Heavens, don’t ask me! How do *you* tell a woman’s age?”

“Well, I suppose she’s thirty-five or forty. If you asked her she’d tell you—and you could rely on its being the truth, which is more than you can say of some women. Yes, sir—ee—even on the witness stand! She once said that ‘a man’s as old as he feels, and a woman’s just as old as she makes a man feel.’ She’s about as honest as they make ’em, and about as erratic! I don’t gossip generally, but her husband left everything in trust to the daughter, only considerately stating that it was by his wife’s request, and another strange clause: Mrs. Ned has got to spend a portion of her time, every year, at Brimfield. She enjoys her share of the income and it’s big enough to keep the pot boiling, and it does boil at times, I reckon—ah,

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'woman—woman, in her hours of ease'—she, er—does whatever seems to please! My apologies to the poet! . . . Hello! there's Ellery; let's dodge him."

They had reached the broad entrance to the old hotel. Mr. Slocum, lounging on the porch, was cackling to a horsy-looking individual who made occasional short replies to Ellery's rush of words.

"Howdy, doctor!" cried the voluble proprietor to Kellogg, as he passed, at the same time winking to the judge; "I see'd you!" He followed them into the hallway. "I see'd you talkin' to the lady in the auter up the street." Then, confidentially, lowering his voice: "She's a case, eh? Regular storm-along! Ain't she?"

There was no reply; the judge's expression was absolutely stone deaf. But Mr. Slocum was unabashed.

"I tell you there's a lot of good in her, though," he continued. "The factory folks down to the Falls just swear by her."

"Supper ready, Ellery?" asked the judge cheerfully.

"Go right in, go right in!" replied Mr. Slocum, waving his hand toward the dining room, and with that he went back to the patient sufferer on the Mansion House porch.

"Old gossiping wind bag," grunted the judge. "But he's right; there's a lot of good in her, despite all that—" He checked himself, and putting on his spectacles picked up the bill of fare.

## CHAPTER III

### A PLEDGE OF VERITY

**I**T was over two months later. Kellogg had moved from the hotel, and was living in the big house, with the white Greek portico, that stood in lone solemnity back of the wide lawn dotted with evergreens. His office on Main Street had been found out by a few of the sick and the halt, and already he had begun to pick up a little outside practice, despite the judge's remark about the healthfulness of the community.

One day he had been summoned to Lower Meadow Farm, and there he had found that Mrs. Bellwood's mother, old Mrs. Winter, was really very ill. He had been there to call, of course, in a friendly way, as he had called upon many of his old acquaintances. Any number of times of late he had dropped in at the Bellwoods'; he had lunched, supped, or dined with them with the privilege of old friendship. But never, yet, had he found Amy alone—except for one or two, to him, heart-stirring, silent minutes, or occasional, accidental intervals, when the talk had drifted, as if by consent, into channels carrying it far from any reference to themselves. She seemed bent on leaving her husband and him together, absenting herself on pleas of household duties usually. To tell the truth, he had seen her at longer intervals at church than elsewhere!

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Since his coming Lawrence had attended the services at St. John's religiously—that is, the Sunday morning services. He had always believed in the capacities of his friend, the minister; but on two occasions, at least, he had been surprised by the flow of eloquence, the contagious, spiritual enthusiasm with which the Reverend Bellwood had swayed his congregation. It was not the deep reasoning he had shown, but the power of putting himself in another's place, of giving vent to the expressions of another's mental attitude.

Not only did Kellogg agree with the judge in his opinion that the bar had lost a splendid pleader, but he was convinced that, if acting was ever the truthful expression of real feeling, the world had lost an artist. Yet he could not recall that Bellwood had at any time been on the verge of the sensational. The convincing part of his discourse had been due to its subdued intensity, its powerful suggestion, and the words, the beautifully spoken words! Once or twice he had wondered if the minister's powers were not thrown away upon his immediate following; he marveled that he had not been tempted to a wider field than was to be found in the little half-town, half-village community.

He was thinking all this over, now, as he drove up from the street toward the big lonely house. Amy was happy! That comforted him somehow, even if her surrender to the placid vista had puzzled him at first. He smiled as he recalled that long-ago tirade of his in the days of his early restlessness, when he had arrayed ambition and pleasure against peace and contentment; wherein he had proclaimed boldly for the living joys of the city, and decried the bucolic existence—above all such places as Brimfield. Yet, here, he believed

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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were two people who had found what few find in life. It was odd that so often he was forced to argue that it must be the truth.

The man who was waiting to take his horse to the stable spoke to him before he climbed out of the buggy.

"Somebody come down from Mrs. Winter's at three o'clock," he said, "and left a message for you to come up there as soon as you come in."

"Who was it?" Lawrence asked.

"The hired man, sir. He 'lowed that the old lady was took rather bad. Mrs. Bellwood's been over there most of the afternoon."

"Put the horse up. I'll go across lots," said the doctor, "and tell Mary I won't be back till later."

He tossed the reins round the whip and, jumping lightly to the ground, squeezed through an opening in the evergreen hedge and started at a fast walk through the meadow.

It was only one of those changes that, alarming to the uninitiated, are merely, to the physician, signs of the inevitable end. He had spoken but a few words to Mrs. Bellwood when he had first entered the house, so he was not surprised, when he came down from the sick room, to find her waiting at the bottom of the stairs. As he reassured her, he could feel her eyes searching him.

"Then there is no immediate danger?" she asked.

"None in the least. It is just a symptom," he replied.

"There is no necessity for my staying here to-night?"

"None at all. I think she will rest comfortably. May I walk home with you, if you are going?"

## *A PLEDGE OF VERITY*

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She nodded thoughtfully. "I was going to ask you to—please do." Then she added slowly: "I've wanted to see you, Larry—wanted to talk with you. I've been waiting for the opportunity; somehow it did not come as I hoped it would. But I shall have to think a little. How shall I begin?"

The pathway led back from the road and across the meadow to a footbridge over the river. For a few minutes neither Kellogg nor Amy said a word, walking on in silence. He wondered if, in her mind, there was any connection of thought between their presence and that particular spot where the willows threw their deepest shadows over the lazily moving water. There must have been, for suddenly she spoke.

"Do you remember, ever so long ago, a certain compact that we entered into, Lawrence?" Then, as if to forestall another recollection that the words might bring to him, she went on hurriedly: "It was here—here, on this very spot—long ago."

"Yes," he replied, pausing, with a catch of breath at the perturbing vividness of the remembrance. "Here where we stand now."

"You said," continued she, as if he had not spoken, "that you would always tell me the truth, that we would be very, very honest with one another—always, always, no matter what happened. Does that compact hold good now?"

"It does," was the slow reply; "we have never broken it."

"How long can my mother live?"

"It is hard to tell—maybe a year; or longer, perhaps, if she could get away." The bluntness of the speech was softened by its note of sympathy.



## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

They had started walking again, but lingered upon the footbridge. She had made no comment at first, but now she spoke, so low that he bent down to listen.

"A year! It seems so short a time! Yet a great deal can happen in a year. . . . She should get away, you say?"

"Yes," assented Kellogg. "Your mother might live longer if she could get to a warmer and drier climate. It is the winter that I fear."

"It is quite hopeless, then?"

"I am afraid so."

"And nothing one can do—nothing, nothing!"

Amy Bellwood stopped, with both elbows on the rail, looking down at the black water, then she placed her finger tips to her eyes for an instant. Lawrence looked at the slender white hands and those finger tips—marked, alas! with signs of the industrious needle—and the wonderful, beautifully youthful sweep of her neck as she inclined her head. His heart began to beat more rapidly; he longed to comfort her—to help her.

"It is dreadful to be poor," she said at last slowly, half passionately; then she turned to him quickly, a swift entreaty in her glance: "No, no; forgive me for saying that—I mean for showing it. You were kind to tell me the truth; always tell me the truth, Larry. We have to accept life just as it comes to us, don't we?"

"It is the best rule we're taught—so far as the world goes," he rejoined, controlling himself by a summoning of will. "Some people call it philosophy. I wonder why! Does it make it easier? I'm sure I don't know. It's a bit of a riddle—no matter how we read it."

## *A PLEDGE OF VERITY*

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"It's all in what we bring to it," she answered. "It's not what is written there to read. We must bring the best in us; yet it is so hard to be patient at times, isn't it? . . . I must tell Frank." She hesitated. "He's not well—Larry, you must try to help him. That's what I meant to say to you—what I wanted to see you about. You must get him to talk with you. Has he spoken much about himself?"

"No; but you are right, he is not well; he should take a long rest—worry is bad for him. He feels too keenly; you are right, Amy—and things dwell with him. He is one who should save up his sympathies."

"Can we do that?" she asked bravely. "Surely, if we didn't see and feel with others, life would be very hopeless. We are either lifting or leaning; there is no middle way. . . . But I want you to tell me—what to do. Always be the same good friend of his—and mine you used to be. I shall not exact too much of you."

"You could exact nothing that would be too much," answered Kellogg slowly. "Nothing."

She looked up at him. Had she ever exacted anything? Dimly it seemed to her she had. And had he ever failed her? Unconsciously there was a question in her eyes.

"What is it?" He stood there gazing down at her. "You were going to say something. Don't hold it back! Ask me."

"No." She said it very gently. "No—I was just thinking—wondering."

"What about?"

"Many things—we've both changed, haven't we?"

"I have, I dare say; I hope so! You haven't—"

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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as I look at you. But— No, really, you haven't changed, in any way I could define."

"Oh, yes, I have; a great deal. People don't stand still; some show changes less than others; but everything we go through leaves a mark, inside or out. We may forget it or hide it for a time; but it's there."

"But you were going to ask me something—you said that you were 'wondering'— Please go on." He had been thinking of a plan; he hoped that she would lead the way to his proposing it.

"I was wondering if you had been happy." Her eyes sought his face with an unspoken offer of swift sympathy. "I had so hoped——"

He hesitated now. The question opened so many dangerous passes. He parried. "Do I look unhappy? Is that what you see in me?"

"Yes, sometimes. But your chief change is that you can make up your mind now. You are *sure* of things. . . . But I will ask it! Have you been unhappy?"

He tried to smile. But she saw that he did not wish to go on—if the subject was himself.

"Do forgive me," she murmured softly. "You see, you should not have let me ask— I only wish that I could help. . . . I can't, can I?"

He shook his head and turned to her again. "It is you I want to talk about," he said, meeting her eyes. "I know it may be tactless; but I always wanted to do things my own way—won't you let me manage things now?"

"You can—you're going to."

"You mean about Frank and——"

"Yes; you will try to get him to give up here,

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for a time, and rest. Advise him to drop his work, won't you? He must, really he must. And you will tell me just how it is with him?"

"Of course I will; I'll give him an overhauling, and you must back up all my sage instructions. But now listen to me, Amy: that's not all I want to do!"

"Well?"

"Let me make it seem possible—I mean easier—for him to drop work, as you say; advice is so cheap that it is less than nothing."

"Oh, no, no; please don't," she interposed. "I know what you are going to say. We couldn't accept. We couldn't! I'm just as grateful—don't mistake me—I'm ever so grateful. But it couldn't be done that way! If you could persuade him to go somewhere and rest; then he could return, perhaps, and go on again, strong and well. Then I might take my mother South this winter; I—we have a little saved. I've been preparing for it—since—oh, long ago; and Mr. Lewis—he's the senior warden—he knows Frank's not in good health. The congregation might—I am sure they would——"

She stopped, almost in dismay, as a person does who, in a self-argument, runs up against the blank wall of the unanswerable.

He stood silent, thinking hard. He knew that the congregation had all they could do to meet the interest on that millstone of a mortgage. He saw the despair in her face. He reasoned to its source, but perceived he must not show his pity—though her head was bowed again.

"But, Amy, doesn't our old compact that we made here, so long ago, mean more than just simply being

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truthful? You once gave it a name, a name like a story: 'The Great Friendship'—wasn't that what you called it? Let me just be that friend, won't you?"

"Why, of course, you will always be 'that friend.' You are the very one—the only one! How could it be otherwise? You know when you returned so suddenly it was as if you must have known how much I—*we* needed you—needed you just now."

"But—unless one is given a chance—how can the need be proved? And you have made up your mind not to let me help." Although it was a simple statement it was keen with questioning.

"But I've told you how."

"Not practically. Frank has an absurd prejudice; he won't listen. It's worry that's the greatest part of his trouble. Worry kills quicker than pace—Now, please, won't you listen to an idea of mine, a suggestion? It is just as easy——"

She anticipated his words and checked him. "Please don't begin that way; it is the wrong way to begin. We must be in your debt for friendship; that is something we can repay." She smiled a pathetic little smile. "Don't you see?" she asked.

"I won't say I see—but count on my aid."

Their eyes met again. "Always," she said, "and you must trust me, too—to understand." Again she hesitated. "Something very big, very great, has come into your life. That's what has changed you, Lawrence!"

"Yes—something bigger than I ever knew, or thought."

"Poor Larry! And I had so hoped you would be

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happy. I had longed so to hear of it. I thought perhaps you might like to tell me. I used to keep saying: 'Some day, perhaps, I'll hear.' But I never heard."

"There is nothing to tell, Amy."

Unknown to him his voice had shaken. He stepped back and half turned away to smother the impulse of heart and tongue. He was frightened at his sudden exaltation, wrung through and through by the stirring of his great unspoken longing.

"I wish I could help. I am so sorry." She had half extended her hand toward him; he seemed to feel it, although he did not see it. By all means it was better so just then that he did not touch that hand!

"We must be going," she said at last.

The lights were beginning to show in the windows of a few of the outlying houses, and the illuminated front of the clock tower in the big building on the square showed that it was after eight. They walked on again in silence, a silence he felt grateful for, as he left her at the gate of the rectory. But the pressure of her fingers, as they rested in his for a minute, stayed with him a long time; the thrill of the low voice, the pathos of the brave gray eyes, haunted him. How her beauty had been enhanced by the twelve years! It was, too, as if he had a fresh gift of understanding of her soul and mind. Again there swept over him that overwhelming sense of loss, untinged as yet by any thought of jealousy! And he was puzzled by her attitude. He would have to watch his own more carefully! He felt the subconscious gratitude that a man does for an accidental, but timely, warning. But there had been

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some guarded intention in her questioning. What could it be?

When he reached home he picked up the letters on his desk in the library and brought them into the dining room; placing them beside his plate as he began his lonely and belated meal.

One, written in a strange, bold hand, attracted his attention. He opened it before the rest and, as he read, abstractedly, he first frowned, then half smiled and tossed it carelessly aside. But before he came to his coffee, which he brewed himself in a little bubbling French caldron, he read it through once more.

DEAR DR. KELLOGG :

So you are still here! and I have returned! Come and dine with me as you promised? Have lots to talk about—Paris was delightful as ever! You will be longing to be there soon! Have you a good memory? If so, you can prove it to me! I will give you four months more—or is your certainty still certain? Come Thursday at eight; or Friday, or any old time— But *come! Dis-moi ce que tu manges, je te dirai ce que tu es!*

Yours hopefully and faithfully,

CATHERINE E. RICE.

The note was certainly familiar in its rather sudden offhandedness. But at last it seemed to him that its very good nature outweighed anything else, although there was something in it that perplexed, even as it amused him. Every sentence ended with a question mark or exclamation.

He opened the rest of his mail. Three letters bore foreign postage stamps; one was from Vienna, another from Brussels, and the third from London. He looked

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them through carefully, without a change in his expression, and took up the others. There was an invitation to lecture at the Medical College at Antioch, the big city twenty miles away on the lake front; and one requesting a contribution to a surgical journal. He gathered them impatiently together; then, hastily rising, went outside and, lighting a cigarette, seated himself on the portico steps.

A cold damp something touched his hand.

"Hullo, Robin Adair," he laughed, slipping his arm about the rough body of the big Airedale terrier. "You don't have any problems to face, do you, old chap?"

He fell to thinking of that strange conversation on the footbridge. One thing was clear: he must lead Frank Bellwood to talk about himself. Then he would see what could be done. There was some lurking trouble that up to this time had been unsuspected by him.

His thoughts drifted back to Amy: her wifely devotion, her loving solicitude, the fear that she had so bravely tried to conceal, the attempt she had made to encourage her own hope and that had shown so plainly its futility.

He made no concealment of his own position to himself. He had loved her in the old days with the love of a frank-hearted, reckless boy—he had felt so sure of her!—the playmate love that signals over hedgerows and whistles under windows, the romping, hand-swinging affection of rejoicing, untried youth! It had been strong enough to have lived intangibly through the long, unhearing years of separation. But now! Well, he could serve—that was left to him! It





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would be a trust as sacred as if she herself had placed it in his keeping, a trust to be guarded from himself as well as its existence kept sacred from the eyes of others. And she had given him a task also—a responsibility that showed her confidence. It made a bond between them, no less because it raised a barrier.

## CHAPTER IV

### VANTAGE POINTS

**I**T had been a long pull up the steep, winding path, but at last they had reached the bare knoll that crowned the wooded hill overlooking the valley. Often, as boys, they had made the journey, and now, on their first day's outing, they had chosen this for their excursion.

"It begins to look like fall," panted the minister, stooping to pick up a blood-red maple leaf that the wind had drifted to the summit. Then, after a pause, between long-drawn breaths, he continued slowly: "I don't like to see it come—it saddens me."

"I love it," returned Kellogg, seating himself on the ledge of a big gray boulder. "There is no sadness in it really. Everything bursts into a diapason of color, like a grand finale that leaves you contented to rest and remember it. I have been longing for the sensation; one misses it abroad. Man! could anything be more beautiful!" He swept his arm out in an all-embracing gesture.

Three miles away, and many hundreds of feet below them, lay the town of Brimfield, the white houses showing through the trees and orchards, the clock tower and two or three church spires rising above the elms. The big red factories at Kenton Falls could be

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seen in the distance, and here and there shining expanses of the river. Up the stream, in a little valley to the eastward, the great, unsightly standpipe of the waterworks was softened by the distance into the tower of a feudal castle; the only blot was an ugly gash of excavation and unfinished masonry across a cuplike meadow, where the new dam was in process of construction. The woods all about had begun to show patches of autumn coloring; the hillsides everywhere were touched with haphazard spots of purple, red, and yellow.

Bellwood, still breathing hard, leaned back against the rock, twirling the leaf stem in his fingers. His eyes gazed out into nothingness, for, despite his physical exhaustion, his thoughts were busy. Lawrence Kellogg turned from a rapt enjoyment of the view and, for a full minute, watched him closely. He saw the laboring chest, the flush on the pallid face, and the trembling palpitation at the throat and temples; the hard climb up the hill had told on the minister's vitality; the clockwork was out of gear; the pendulum swung unevenly.

"Frank," he suddenly exclaimed, "I never meant to set you such a pace! you're out of condition; you've got to look out for yourself. Let's hear the old heart?"

Bellwood smiled.

"Something's been wrong for a long time, Larry," he returned, as Kellogg slid down beside him and placed his ear against his chest. "Too much tobacco, too much coffee—go on——"

"Too much worry, too much many things—too little rest," broke in Kellogg. "I'll have to take you

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in hand, Frank, old chap; you need a thorough going over."

"It's the same old trouble. That's all!" Bellwood was drawing himself together. "You remember I never could go in for athletics. I'm a bad risk; no company will take me; I've tried several. Don't let's talk about it."

"All right, if you don't wish to; but I repeat—you need looking after."

"I need something, yes," Bellwood murmured pathetically; "indeed I do."

"What is it, old chap?"

"I can't tell you in so many words; but if I should try, I should say I needed peace, peace!—God give me peace!"

He stopped suddenly, panting as hard as if he had again climbed the hill; he turned to his companion as if half in fear, expecting him to say something, to search him further. But Kellogg had seated himself on the ground, apparently without noticing the sudden outburst; it was better to let him finish without pressing him just then. Bellwood, recovering slowly, sank down beside him. The shadow of a bitter smile was on his lips; his fingers trembled as he laid them on Kellogg's arm.

"You see," he said, "you cannot help me; no one can help me! Pray forgive me all this, won't you?—and forget it."

"I'm going to help you a lot," said his friend earnestly.

The minister shook his head and, clasping his knees, leaned back against the stone in silence, with closed eyes. Kellogg stole a long look at him.

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It was a beautiful face—Greek, almost, in its purity. Only the wrinkles across the brow, and the lines downward from the eyepit, and the drooping corners of the lips, prevented its being youthful. The long, dark lashes against the cheeks that were now pale again were curved and fine, like a woman's. Yet, there was nothing neutral in its combination of strength and weakness; it possessed certain marked elements of power.

There was a young actor, Kellogg remembered seeing often in Paris, whose resemblance to Bellwood had been striking, and whose appearance had been the subject of much discussion. He repelled some people as strongly as he attracted others; there was no mere toleration of his individuality. Women either loved him or detested him; men were enthusiastic partisans, or out-and-out detractors. He appealed in his acting, also, directly to individual temperaments or passing moods; he aroused the sensations, not the senses. Personally he had been both a libertine and a coxcomb.

Bellwood shared few of these characteristics with this outward appearance. He certainly had some control over women, from his good looks alone, and to these he added the quality of brains and a tenor voice of rare quality which would have made him doubly dangerous had he chosen knight errantry for a pastime; seemingly, however, he possessed no desire for adventure. His nickname at college, "Saint Anthony," quite aptly described him so far as his feelings for the gentler sex were concerned. With men his influence had its limitations; he had been unpopular as an undergraduate with the mass of his fellow-students, yet he possessed not a few firm friends, and a number of de-

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voted followers among those who went in more for books than for brawn. The only time he had attracted popular attention was once when he had appeared in a serious old English morality play, given by the Dramatic Association. Then for a week his name was on all lips. It was his first and last appearance.

Frank Bellwood's intimacy with Lawrence Kellogg had puzzled many. At a hasty glance they seemed to have little in common; but they had been fellow-townsmen, old schoolmates, and were inseparable during the four years of their university life. That Lawrence's father had paid their joint bills was known only to the Registrar of the Faculty.

Neither of the two on the hilltop had moved or spoken for some minutes. It was Bellwood at last who broke the silence.

"Had we better be moving?" he asked. "I feel all right now."

"No; let's sit here a little longer, Frank; there's no hurry. I want to talk to you about something."

"No questions about health, or habits, or tiresome medical advice, please. I refuse to answer on any grounds. There's nothing the matter."

"No, I don't mean to touch on that subject just now; it's something else. Do you happen to know a Mrs. Rice who lives at the big new place on the river? 'The Hill,' we used to call it."

The minister turned on his elbow and regarded Kellogg curiously.

"Mrs. Ned Rice? No—that is, I have not met her for a long time. Years ago we had just a speaking acquaintance. Everyone here knows her by sight, though."

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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“Then she’s not a member of your congregation?”

“A member of my congregation! man, dear!—she’s a Pagan, out and out! She never goes to church—she—” Bellwood checked himself suddenly. “I suppose she has redeeming qualities, saving graces; I hope we all have,” he concluded. “She comes of a good family on her father’s side; her mother was the daughter of a hatter in San Francisco.”

“I am interested,” put in Kellogg. “That’s the only reason I inquired; but I had no curiosity in her pedigree.”

“Do you want my opinion of her? I haven’t any to express,” rejoined Bellwood slowly. “She subscribed largely to the Atheneum and to the Working Girls’ Home we started at Kenton Falls. I wrote her a letter of thanks—but I never would let Amy call upon her.”

“Why not?”

“Well, to be honest, I couldn’t bear the thought of it! She may be maligned, of course; but she’s too reckless of public opinion; people say so many things!” He paused, evidently distressed.

“I don’t wish in the least to hear what people say, old chap,” smiled Kellogg. “Nor to extract gossip from a man who hates it. You know me better than that. Let it pass!”

Bellwood thought for a moment and then went on nervously: “Well, I’d just as lief tell you, there’s no reason why I shouldn’t. She’s supposed to be a sort of a freethinker—I mean a free lance. You know my colleague, Remsen Bache, of St. Mary’s at the Falls?”

“No, I don’t think I know him.”

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“An able man—rather high church, but he has a cutting tongue at times—he calls her ‘Catherine the Great.’”

“Does *he* know her?” asked Kellogg, mentally forming an opinion of Mr. Remsen Bache.

“I haven’t the least idea; I am—er—sorry I’ve said what I did; I don’t usually——”

“I understand, old man; *you* didn’t say it,” Lawrence interrupted.

Bellwood started to rise and then sat down again. “May I ask why you are interested?” he inquired. “Have you met her? She is here quite seldom; I—I thought she was still in Europe.”

“She returned two days ago; I’m dining with her to-morrow night——” He stopped at the look on the minister’s face, and went on hurriedly: “I’ve only seen her once in my life, here. I could not call myself a friend nor, as yet, a champion of hers. Don’t feel bad about it.”

“Larry,” said the minister earnestly, “don’t go; I wouldn’t go!” He laid both hands on Kellogg’s arm. “Can’t you get out of it? She’s not the kind of a woman that does a man any good; men are her game, she is a destroyer of lives, an obliterator of ideals. What good can come of knowing her? I tell you she is out of her sphere—out of her century! Who are her friends here? whom does she go with?—Men who drink with her openly at the Antioch Country Club on the Sabbath! Some few people who are afraid to offend her because she has money! What does she do on her excursions to New York? How does she conduct herself at Paris and Monte Carlo?”

“Hold hard, Frank; you’ve been talking to women



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—you'll make a champion yet of me. Judge Hollins——”

“Judge Hollins!” repeated Bellwood, interrupting fiercely. “He's one of them—and old enough to know better! But mind you——”

He stopped suddenly with a catch of labored breath, his face hidden in both hands. Kellogg watched in some alarm; here was some trouble he could not understand! But Bellwood recovered quickly and, as he raised his head, all his passion had left him.

“Who am I to talk this way?” he said at last, almost whispering. “Does the punishment we may suffer hereafter equal the punishment we may suffer on earth? Who am I to judge thus of my fellow-creatures! By what right may one sinner judge of another?”

The preacher had disappeared, although the words were set and clerical; it was the *man* thinking, talking—talking more to himself than to his listener.

Kellogg looked at the drawn white face; the lips were moving as if in ejaculatory prayer.

The concerned interest of the physician, suddenly aroused, faded into the pity of one friend for another in distress. Lawrence let his arm fall upon the minister's shoulder, but the latter evaded the kindly meant caress.

“Come,” he said almost harshly, “we'd better be going.”

“Right—O! Up we get! Easy, down the hill now,” returned Kellogg, rising.

Bellwood ignored the proffered hand and pushed himself to his feet.

Slowly they descended the path, winding through

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the maple grove, interspersed with the black masses of the pines. Crossing a steep pasture, filled with hard-back bushes, they came to a rocky lane down which they made their way to the well-traveled road that led to the railway station.

The Antioch local was just stopping at the platform, the few passengers were descending; the strangers the object of attack of the rival hotel runners, and the Brimfield citizens making their way to the line of waiting vehicles.

"There is one of Mrs. Rice's particular cronies—a nice kind of a creature for a woman's intimate associate!" said Bellwood, indicating a tall, thick-set man of forty who was climbing into a rubber-tired runabout. "A divorcé, a gambler, smirched in connection with the bribery scandals, whose price in politics has been known for years, and whose lack of personal morals is notorious!"

Kellogg half smiled; it was almost the first time the minister had spoken since leaving the hilltop. His words were in marked contrast to his bitter self-arraignment of an hour before.

Mr. Murger—for it was none other—caught a glimpse of Bellwood and his companion, and turned to a large, red-faced man who sat on the narrow seat of the runabout beside him. The red-faced one, laughing over his shoulder, included Bellwood and Kellogg in a long, insolent stare.

"Barney McCutcheon, the labor leader—candidate for mayor of Kenton Falls," remarked the minister. "Murger is on the ticket for district attorney. A fine pair of rascals! They both have tacitly encouraged threats and violence when we've had strikes.

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Trouble is expected any day, now, at the water-works."

"Judge Hollins has told me a little something of the situation," Kellogg rejoined. "They are not elected yet!"

"But they will be, unless something unforeseen happens," said Bellwood. "They have the lawless element and some money back of them, and that means votes in this part of the country. I've heard more than one person express a wish that your father was alive to handle the situation. Why don't you declare yourself, eh? and go in for politics?"

"I've neither taste nor bent for it," answered Lawrence lightly. "I've lived away so long, and being born over there, I hardly know my status as a citizen; you know I never could make a speech to save me. I always trusted you to do that for me, in the old days, didn't I?"

Bellwood hesitated.

"Yes, I believe you did," he said slowly, a strange note in his voice. His step lagged a little and Kellogg, shortening his stride, looked down at him. There was an expression on his face as of one in sudden physical pain.

"Frank," suggested the doctor, "stop at my office, like a good chap, won't you? There may be a message for me. And then I'll walk home with you. It's only a minute out of the way."

On the slate that hung at the door were scribbled a few straggling sentences. Kellogg read them through as he took out his keys.

"I've got to go down to the Tevelins' at The Bend," he said. "'Hubble, bubble, toil and trouble!' I

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should think there were enough children already! But come in; I want to have a word with you."

Bellwood stepped through the door into the little hallway, off the consulting room.

"Are you attending the Tevelins?" he asked. "They're a bad lot—the whole family. I wish they would clear out of the neighborhood. They begin all the diseases, and Tevelin's been twice in jail."

"So I understand," answered Kellogg, as he raised the blinds in the front office; "Pat was predestined—a man with a wide envy for other people's property—especially dogs! Come in here, Frank."

The minister entered nervously. Kellogg turned and, seating himself on the corner of the desk, motioned him to the easy chair.

"Frank," he said, "why don't you take a vacation? You need it. Speaking as a physician and repeating what I probably will repeat again, you've got to take care of yourself."

"Vacation!" exclaimed Bellwood, passing his fingers through his long, brown locks—his only external affectation—"I really couldn't think of it—really! . . . Has Amy been talking to you?" he asked quickly, shooting a half-suspicious glance at Kellogg, as he raised his head. "You've been meeting her frequently at her mother's—has she?"

"I've only seen her once there; but I want you to listen to a proposition: Mrs. Winter is an ill woman; you're *not* a well man— Hold on now! I may be abrupt, but I know what I am talking about! Why don't you and the old lady and Amy and the children go off for a season? Rest and take it easy for six months."

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“Rest and take it easy for six months!” The minister quoted the sentence with a bitter laugh. “I wonder who you think I am—what you think we are? It is more than out of the question; such talk is absolute, downright rubbish! Rest!”

Again he laughed, this time contemptuously, with a toss-back of his head.

“No, I don’t think it is such rubbish. Won’t you—won’t you, as an old friend, let me put something before you and listen? Let *me* do this. You could get some one to fill your place; it could be made to appear as if it came from the whole congregation. I’m not qualified for a warden, but I am a pew-holder. Won’t you let me?”

“No, sir!”

The vehemence of Bellwood’s reply was absolutely startling. Kellogg looked at him in sheer amazement. He had risen to his feet, and his slight form was trembling with hardly repressed emotion.

“Do you think I can go on forever accepting largess from your hand?” he continued hoarsely. “I tell you, if I was in poverty and distress, I could accept nothing further from you—I couldn’t, I couldn’t take anything more! It would kill me to think of it—I forbid you to offer it—or to speak of it to Amy—I forbid you!”

Kellogg looked at him undisturbed. Bellwood had always been more or less elusive, even to him, but now it was more marked than ever. His conceit had a hair trigger that demanded careful handling.

“Sit down, Frank, sit down,” he said quietly. “I had no wish to offend you. If, as you say, it’s out of the question, well and good; we’ll drop it. I won’t

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trouble in that way again, of course. But—and don't let your pride stop me here—I must tell you certain things. I must warn you. If you resent my suggestion as a friend, you must take my advice as a doctor; you need it. Go and see Smith at Antioch—I know him—and he will tell you the truth. You must avoid overwork, excitement. You fainted twice after the afternoon service last Sunday, in the vestry room. Barton, the sexton, told me so."

"It was nothing; it was very hot, and I had had no luncheon. There is nothing the matter that can be mended."

"There is something the matter and it must be mended."

Bellwood, who had sunk down in the seat again, leaned his elbows on his knees and bent forward. His shoulders heaved as if he was on the verge of a complete breakdown. Kellogg took hold of him gently.

"Come, let's thrash this all out," he said, dragging up a chair with one hand, the other still resting on his friend's arm. "Let's begin at the beginning."

"No, no! Not now!" cried the minister, drawing himself erect. "Another time, not now!" Something akin to fear showed in his voice.

He rose and stood, half swaying, fumbling for his hat and stick on the desk. When at last he found them he turned, with an effort controlled himself, and spoke calmly, apparently voicing a heartfelt sincerity.

"Don't think that I fail to appreciate your kindness. I spoke hastily—bitterly; and I crave your pardon! You are the bigger man, Lawrence—the better man; you can forgive me. I may not have long to live— But let me ask you something: Don't, don't,

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I pray, force me deeper in your debt! Some day, if I should ask——”

“Ask it now,” interrupted Kellogg, seeing that he had paused as if at loss. “As for being in my debt—you’re not! And as for being a bigger or better man—I am not worthy to tie your shoes. I’ve gambled and drank, and done those things that I ought not to have done, and I dare say I’ve given you no end of worry over my spiritual condition. So we will cut all that out of the argument. You have got to take care of yourself; that’s all I insist on!”

Bellwood now had himself well in hand. Only his intense pallor and a nervous twitching of his lips betrayed his effort to appear at ease.

“I must hasten home,” he said. “I’m afraid they’ll be wondering what has become of me. The Dorcas Society meets at the rectory this afternoon; I’ve got to speak to some of the members. Good-by!”

He extended his hand and Kellogg took it, noticing that his fingers were cold as ice. “Don’t worry over me, please don’t,” he continued with a piteous appeal in his eyes. “I can assure you it isn’t necessary.”

Another moment and he was gone. From the window Kellogg watched his tall, slight figure crossing the square.

“Poor old Frank,” he said to himself. “A physical need and a spiritual quandary make a bad combination.”

He had failed in his first attempt to relieve the situation—failed utterly—but he was not disheartened. There was some mystery about it all. He could not help wondering if Amy knew anything definite of the trouble, whatever it was. She was so strong, and yet

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so instinctively feminine in her swift intuitions. A man in Bellwood's position needed something more than even his religion could supply. He needed the tangible evidence of another's abiding faith in his work, his future, and in himself. But surely he had that, if ever a man had!

Lawrence crossed to the rosy western window and stood there looking out. It was not the strong glare of the noble sunset that made his eyes glisten; it was not the scent of the late mowing that swept in with the breeze that made him draw that long, quivering breath.

Suddenly he remembered the message on the slate. The Tevelins were the black sheep—and incidentally the scapegoats—of the community; but that had nothing to do with the fact that they needed assistance. He packed some things in his bag and telephoned for his trap to pick him up at the office. This done, he threw himself down in the easy chair.

Thinking of the Tevelins had brought him back once more to the standing subject of his thoughts. The association of ideas was not without cause. He smiled a little as his mind flew backward to a day a score of years before.

He was a slim-legged little boy just in his teens, dressed in an imported Eton roundabout and a big white collar. It was a rainy day in early spring. He was walking along a Brimfield back street, holding a small umbrella with such chivalric generosity that his shoulder caught most of the drippings. Huddled quite close to him was a little girl of ten. He remembered how her hair seemed to curl up tighter by reason of the dampness. One hand held the crook of the um-



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brella beneath his. As they went chattering by the corner near the blacksmith's shop (how it all came back to him!) Jack Hogan, the blacksmith's son—the young cock of the school and juvenile bully of the village—addressed him from the shelter of the hitching shed in terms contemptuous with unmistakable opprobrious intent. It may have been the collar, it may have been the Eton jacket, it might have been the umbrella. He tingled red, he remembered, but went on. This had been enough incentive for “Fisty Jack” Hogan. A muddy stick, hurled perhaps at the slim legs in their long gray trousers, caught the little girl on the hem of her white skirt. She turned with him and took in the situation.

“Go for him, Larry,” she said. “I’ll hold the umbrella.”

Never did knight go forth to do battle under prouder prompting! At the end of five minutes, disheveled and muddy, with a fast-closing eye and a strange warm taste in his mouth that kept him swallowing, he stood above the prostrate Hogan in the middle of the muddy street. And not until then did he notice that the little figure under the umbrella was not the only spectator. From the shelter of the blacksmith shop, a number of hard-featured men had stood and watched. He remembered now the strange words of encouragement and appreciation, addressed to himself, or his antagonist, he could not tell; but when the fight was over a big hand had rested on his shoulder.

“Blood’ll tell,” said a rough voice in his ear. “Blood’ll tell, me b’ye! You’re a great fighter, son, and you’ll live to prove it! And if ever you want a hand in your corner, call for Paddy Tevelin; I’ll be

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there! And now home, my dear, an' a bit o' raw beef on the eye; that'll take out the swellin'."

Oh! that journey home through the rain! He did not realize until halfway there that his little companion was sobbing soft sobs of fearsome pride. When they had reached the gate to her father's house he remembered now that she looked up at him, the tears still in the long, dark lashes.

"Oh, your poor eye!" she murmured sympathetically.

"Never mind that!" he had replied. "My eye's all right."

"I'll kiss it and make it well," she said, and there, under the umbrella, was the salve administered. Never had soldier borne the scar of courage with less shame than he, as he carried that blackened orb for a fortnight.

Tevelin had always remembered that little impromptu mill; he had always claimed, as it were, a feeling of respectful brotherhood, and when a few days before he had told the "new doctor" of the coming trouble at The Bend, it was with an appeal as powerful in its reminiscence as the freemason's signal of distress.

Lawrence glanced out of the window again. The trap was there waiting.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CHARM OF CIRCE

MRS. RICE turned, as she entered the dimly lighted hall, and drew aside the *portières* for a last look at the dining room.

It certainly was most inviting. The two high-backed Spanish leather chairs fronted one another cosily at the small round table—which is much more *intime* than a square one! She had seen to the icing of the champagne, sincerely hoping that her expected guest drank champagne instead of whisky and soda. She had carefully selected the most beautiful glass, and chosen the most becoming petticoats for the wax candles in the little Dresden candlesticks. The dinner had been a matter of some discussion between Henri and herself—she had all French servants—and now she was satisfied there was nothing more to be done. Giving a fidgety glance at the clock she devoutly hoped that doctors were punctual people.

Mrs. Ned had spent as much time on her gowning as she had on the dinner, but, at first glance, it might not appear so. The final effect had a comfortable carelessness that could hardly be called studied. The wide, open sleeves showed her smooth, round arms above the elbow, and the drooping lace threatened to slip from the curves of her splendid shoulders; the

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pillar of firm, white throat rose above the magnificent expanse of her bosom. Her dark hair was massed together in some wonderful fashion that seemed innocent of pins, and a red rose, thrust, as if by inspiration, at exactly the right angle, in exactly the right place, gave a finishing touch that was distinctly pleasing, as she glanced at herself in the big hall mirror.

Mrs. Ned's natural color needed no retouching; but, if the truth be told, the arch of her eyebrows was just a little bit fine, and somewhat suspiciously dark.

As the big ormolu clock began to strike, the crunching of wheels sounded on the graveled driveway. Mrs. Rice stepped to the open door and greeted Kellogg as he descended from the buggy.

"On the very stroke!" she said, as they shook hands. "Tell your man to drive to the stable; he can wait there. Henri—he's my *chef* and a dear, crotchety old soul—will owe you a vote of thanks for your promptness. Isn't it a heavenly evening? I'm so glad you could come!"

At first Lawrence, as he removed his coat, wondered if Mrs. Rice was nervous or was endeavoring to set him at his ease by the informality and the volubility of her welcome; but a second later he concluded it was only her natural, hospitable manner. It was too dark in the hallway to see that his hostess, as she was speaking, had flushed to the very roots of her hair.

"You've never been here before," she went on, "have you? You should see the view on a fine evening; Mr. Rice named this place 'Elmside,' but I like the old name, 'The Hill.' The moon will soon come up; we can sit out here and see it after dinner. Look! she's just showing over the tops of the trees!"

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Mrs. Ned had gone to the big window that opened on the stone-flagged terrace, and was standing there, outstretching a jeweled hand, the lace sleeve falling gracefully from the point of her elbow. She beckoned to him.

Lawrence joined her and they stepped slowly out into the open air.

“Hadn’t I better get you a wrap?” he asked.

“Heavens, no!” laughed the widow. “I never take cold. It seems quite balmy—and we will only be here a minute. Pray don’t prescribe for me! I want you to forget your calling and all your learning to-night. Too much knowledge, like self-analysis, is a bar to enjoyment. Please don’t be wise or clever. I hate wisdom and cleverness. I detest definitions! Doesn’t this make you wish you were a poet—or something quite nice and ignorant?”

“I would make a bad fist at poetry, though I confess to reading it,” said Lawrence, smiling. “I could never rhyme ‘cat’ with ‘bat,’ and I get quotations badly mixed, so I never quote. But before I leave my calling—or at least before I forget it and you discover my ignorance—I want to tell you how good it was of you to do what you did for the Tevelins. I was so surprised when I saw you there last evening that I didn’t have time. They told me that you got the nurse from Antioch, and sent all the rest of those things. If you only knew how grateful they were——”

“Poor people! everybody’s down on them,” interrupted Mrs. Ned; “they’re quite beyond the pale of common charity it seems. However, I find it pays to keep on the right side of Pat! If you ever have a sick cow, or horse, or dog, he’s the best vet in the county,

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and such an awful scamp that I positively admire him. They say he's got another wife somewhere. But let's drop it—with one question. How are things?"

"All right—a boy."

"Good! May he live to be a credit to his family—there're too many women in the world."

"There're too few of certain kinds."

"Well, it's a blessing we're not all alike, isn't it?"

"Yes," laughed Kellogg, "I agree with you on that point."

"Which may have a covert meaning, not complimentary to the only member of her sex present," rejoined the widow. "But she will let it pass. . . . Here's Eugene with the cocktails and dinner is ready."

The heavy hangings were drawn aside at the dining-room door, admitting a flood of light into the hall. Lawrence paused and looked about him. The obsequious Eugene, who disdained the strutting form of servitude, had disappeared.

"Taste it slowly," said Mrs. Ned, with her glass to her full, red lips. "It's the invention of a friend of mine from Virginia."

"That is one thing we learn from a residence abroad, too," answered Kellogg. "I mean to sip pleasant things, not to gulp them."

As he spoke he glanced about him again.

The decorations of the hall could hardly be called feminine; a tall bronze of the Flying Mercury stood poised on the broad newel posts; there were some dim oil paintings, and, on green marble pedestals, two beautiful figures of stone-age warriors, one letting fly an arrow and the other carrying a young bear by the scruff.

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The piano, draped with a rich, gilt altar cloth, was covered with photographs, mostly in silver frames, many of them signed. There were officers in uniform, actors in costume, civilians with orders, a Highlander in kilts nursing a huge feather bonnet, and a well-set-up English bishop who was not in the least ashamed of a finely turned leg. Men, all men! True, on the mantel were one or two portraits, certainly not belonging to the "family" order. He recognized the gay Countess de Baleinier, and a fine likeness of Sara as *Hamlet*. But he could pause no longer. Mrs. Ned took the empty glass from him, putting it down with hers on the edge of a little onyx table, and led the way into the dining room.

"I saw you looking at my collection," she laughed, as they sat down. "Some friends of yours, I dare say, among them—we can shred them at our leisure some day. Lady Camilla Macdonald says I parade them as boldly as if I was a head hunter of Borneo, and she ought to know; she's hunted heads in every country under the sun. Do you know, an American woman asked me where she could *buy* them! I told her where I thought she might, without a tremor."

Mrs. Ned's laugh was certainly contagious, and it was accompanied with a little fluttering upward gesture that caused the lace sleeves to display almost the length of her beautiful arms.

If there had been the slightest feeling of constraint at the meeting, thus far, it had now faded completely. Even Lawrence's sensation of being somewhat expectantly on guard vanished, and in its place had come to him a sense of enjoyment of the present, complete and all satisfying, with just the slightest suspicion of

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a delightful excitement. He realized, all at once, the subtle, warmth-compelling influence of sex.

"Do you know, they say that melons take away your taste for champagne," remarked Mrs. Rice. "But I've discovered an antidote—a big swallow of brown sherry taken immediately after the soup."

"Sounds like a prescription."

"Or the advice of a truly scientific *gourmet*—I don't know the feminine for the word," returned Mrs. Ned. "Oh, by the way—how about the wager? You have still four months more to serve."

"I never made any wager. I suppose I couldn't convince you that, as I have told some other people, I have burned my bridges behind me. . . . I seriously intend to remain here and turn into a commonplace country doctor."

"*À la Balzac?*" interrogated Mrs. Rice. "I can't imagine it. Wait until you have a craving that the applause of your well-behaved conscience won't satisfy."

"You mean a desire for the fleshpots of Egypt?"

"No, the sweetmeats thereof; they have a stronger hold."

"I don't feel it yet," returned Lawrence.

"Oh, of course; if you brought your *will* into it, you might turn hermit, if you chose to. You've got a very nice chin that tells me you have plenty of—" She studied him through half-closed eyes. "What shall I call it?"

"Obstinacy?"

"Yes, obstinacy; but there is a cleft in it that shows—well, shows lots of things. We will meet somewhere else than at Brimfield."



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Mrs. Ned made again the fluttering movement with her arms and laughed musically. Then, with her eyes full of merriment, she continued:

"That sounds like an impropotion, a threat, or a comforting reflection, doesn't it? I only meant it as a prophecy. You know people do meet in other places."

"Yes; most unexpected places," returned Lawrence, thinking of the Tevelins. "Hark! What's that?"

"Listen!" whispered Mrs. Rice, holding up a finger.

From the hall, or rather from the terrace outside, came the sound of music, sweet, but thin and tinkling, soft but penetrating. It played a quaint little air, with a throbbing undercurrent of accompaniment and sweeping, liquid runs of melody.

"What is it?" asked Lawrence in pleased bewonderment.

"S-sh! Listen again," cautioned Mrs. Rice. "Have you ever heard it before?"

"Yes; it seems to me I have; but where?"

"Think."

"I can't remember; it's a harp, isn't it?"

"Yes; but the funny little tune!"

"I know, I know; but where was it?"

"I see I will have to tell you a story," said the widow, leaning toward him, her chin resting on her clasped fingers and her elbows on the table. "There is an amusing little place, not far from a big city; and there is a great tree, and in the tree are little platforms on the big branches, and there are tiny tables——"

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“Robinson’s, at Seaux!” exclaimed Lawrence, interrupting.

“And there was a man with a guitar, and he sang that song the harp is playing!”

“The same song——”

“And there was a gay little party on one of the lower limbs, who were much interested,” broke in the widow; “and they were directly underneath.”

“Underneath what?”

“Underneath me,” rejoined Mrs. Ned. The red rose in her hair shook as she laughed.

“There were three of us!” exclaimed Lawrence. “I remember now.”

“But the other chap didn’t count; I met him afterwards. There were only *two* of us.” Again the rose shook.

“I didn’t see you——”

“No, I suppose you—er—thought it would be rude to look at a lady when she was up a tree! But I could have dropped a pat of butter on top of your head. I’ll never get a chance to do it again.”

“The world is a funny little place,” said Kellogg, “isn’t it?”

“The world is a very nice place, if we don’t worry too much over how wicked it is, and if we only remember that we are only here once. By the way, *she* was very *chic*.”

“Yes? He’s stopped playing!”

“He won’t play any more; he’s gone.”

“Why?”

“I only got him to come up and play that tune three times. I happened to hear him and *it* in the village, on the street, to-day, and I engaged him for

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the evening. I suppose he'd have played all night. 'Tout finit par des chansons.' Do you want him back?"

"No," said Lawrence, wondering. "But it was the other fellow's party. I was a guest."

"I wasn't cross-questioning you," replied Mrs. Ned. "But I found out from him who you were. Only, when I did, you had left Paris; you'd just returned from a shooting trip to Asia or somewhere. So the dinner was postponed until Brimfield. Now, let's have a glass of champagne. I hope you like it *brut*; is there anything better?"

"As wine, no; this is excellent."

"Perrier-Jouet, Special Reserved, '89," said Mrs. Rice. "Aren't you glad you came?"

"Yes, very."

"Only on that account? Don't answer me!"

"All right; I won't."

"You know lots about women, don't you?"

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "No."

"Oh, yes, you do! There is that kind of a female person who resents a man claiming to know anything at all about her sex, but resents, still more, any man claiming that no man at all knows anything. I don't resent, I'm not porcupinish; but I agree it's better not to tell."

"I make no claims to knowledge."

"I know you don't; that's one way of asserting them. . . . Here's to us!"

As he sipped his wine Lawrence was conscious that Mrs. Ned was silently questioning him. He raised his head and caught her long look over the rim of his glass. Mrs. Ned was holding hers in both hands and

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her elbows were still on the table. His eyes were the first toower; the blood had flushed hot to his temples.

"What funny, great big boys some men are!" purred the widow softly. There was a pause. "Eat," she said at last with a little laugh.

The dinner went on. Eugene glided in silently with the salad and then, as silently, glided out.

"Weren't you afraid he was going to knock?" whispered Mrs. Ned, leaning across the cloth.

"He's quite like a spirit or a ghost," said Lawrence, choosing to be obtuse.

"Well, I'm not afraid of him, and I might be of a ghost! You'll find some cigarettes there in that silver box. He won't be in again. We'll have our coffee and *liqueurs* on the terrace, or have you lived so long in England that you say 'leküre'?"

"Oh, well, I speak French," said Lawrence, opening the silver box and taking out a long Egyptian. "So I suppose I pronounce it in the American fashion."

"I've *seen* you 'talk' French," smiled Mrs. Ned, "and you appear to talk very well; that is, judging from a bird's-eye view. Do you know, I rather like Frenchmen, for a short time, and as other people's husbands. I was with a most charming one all alone that day. Now, I've shocked you dreadfully! But I never met his wife—he told me all about her—he'd married her for money. She spent most of her time at Nice—and had cut down his allowance, which he spent in Paris. Thank Heaven, American men don't do that sort of thing—I mean exact money—and they don't talk about women that way, especially their wives! 'By and large,' as the saying is, American

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men are the best, if they don't get too highly sentimental, or go in too much for money-making. Women are all the same the world over—mostly cats—with now and then a stray saint, or a faithful maidservant, among them. . . . But please don't think me a pessimist. I enjoy life and living; I only hate a few things."

"What do you hate most?" asked Lawrence, trying to hold Mrs. Ned to her mood.

"I hate the small unkind things that hurt other people—done or said; I hate to see suffering, or to think about it. I'm an awful coward that way."

"What do you like most?"

"Foolish question! I like a good time and a mentally responsive elbow. I hate people who never act on impulse and who study everything out. Come, let's go."

She touched his arm as she rose, then actually caught his hand and led him into the hall. They stopped at the piano, and Mrs. Rice, her eyes shining, pointed at one of the photographs.

"There's the man I was with at Seaux. Don't you think he's good-looking?"

It was the likeness of an individual in a light frock coat, holding a tall, white hat, a cane, and a pair of stiff gloves. The single eyeglass and the simpering face, the mustache brushed up from the half-open lips, irritated Kellogg; the man was of the kind that made his toe itch.

"No; I think he is a beast," he growled bluntly.

"Good!" laughed Mrs. Ned. "That's just what he was—an amusing, interesting, little insect-beast! much the sort one would discover with a microscope and wonder what he would be like if he were larger."

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He wasn't a bit dangerous—any woman could keep him under her thumb——”

“I should think you would have wanted to step on him,” grunted Lawrence.

“He was awfully jealous of you,” cooed the widow, her eyes again full of laughter.

“Jealous of me!”

“Yes; I threatened to drop the butter and then to have him bring you up so that I could make you a proper apology. But let's drop *him* now. There's a man, if you like!”

She picked up another photograph.

“Pardon me, don't you think you'd better let me have a catalogue, with names and dates, weights and colors?”

Lawrence asked the question with mock seriousness, to which Mrs. Rice replied with mock reproach.

“I never supposed you would be so rude. I am quite surprised.”

“I was only displaying an interest in your specimens.”

“Poor Archie Carrisford!” went on the widow, looking at the photograph. “You remember him?”

“Yes,” said Kellogg. “Killed at the Vaal River. I used to know him in Leicestershire. Let me see it.”

He took the silver-mounted, black-leather panel, and Mrs. Ned looked over his shoulder.

“Such a dear, good fellow—although inclined to be domestic and, therefore, serious,” murmured she; “and such a fine figure. Did you ever see such shoulders! I wept when I heard the news. He really touched my heart; poor Archie!”

There was feeling in Mrs. Ned's voice; Lawrence

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turned; her face was very close to his, her hair brushed his cheek, but she did not look at him; her eyes were on the picture of the young guardsman.

"I believe you have a heart," said he musingly.

"Indeed I have a heart! But I hate meaningless vows and maudlin sentiment. Come! our coffee will be cold and our ice melted—I don't know what to call you," she smiled quizzically. "If I used your title, I should feel you ought to charge for the conversation. Yet you needn't be a doctor; you only are one as an excuse for looking serious at times. I wonder if doctors, knowing so much, feel things like other people! I suppose you would define love as 'a primitive cardiac affection'—but heavens! I must stop! Let me see—I met you in a tree; that's the next thing to a wood; I will call you 'Orlando'! You would look well in a doublet and, I dare say, in hose. . . . Come, Orlando!"

Once more the widow took his hand and led him out on the terrace.

The moon was now well up—there was hardly a breath of air to swing the sleeping elms; but so bright was it, that the colors of near-by objects showed; a few late flowers gleamed wonderfully in the garden below the terrace wall. The river was smothered in a winding stretch of silver mist. The outlines of the far-away hills melted into the strange blue sky.

They stood there for a moment, holding hands like children, without speaking.

"She's beautiful to-night, our dear old mother earth," said Lawrence at last.

"But she isn't old," replied Mrs. Ned, beneath her breath. "She's young—she's like a sleeping bride. Oh, how grand it is to live and to feel, and to enjoy—

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to drink it deep. Why should we have care—why sorrow—why old age—when we are given this!”

“To-night seems like a present from the gods!” Lawrence was slowly rising to her mood. “‘And every moon this glory lends—’ There, you see, I am quoting!”

“It’s worshipful!” whispered Mrs. Ned. “It’s worshipful, Orlando.”

She seemed to draw nearer to him for an instant. He could feel the cool length of her arm trembling against his side. The dark, sweetly odorous hair touched his cheek again, then swept across his temple. His blood grew riotous—but the moment passed; he had hardly dared to look. He could hear her breathing, count his own leaping pulse! But the moment passed!

Mrs. Ned dropped his hand and crossed the stone flagging to where the silver and glass shone on the little table in the corner of the ell. She sat down on the divan beneath the Turkish awning. For an instant Lawrence stood still; then he turned slowly, came nearer, and sat down beside her.

“Sillies!” said the widow. “It was the moon—I suspect!”

Her voice wavered slightly and she jingled the silver things nervously with the sugar tongs. Her composure came to her by degrees.

“Just as I told you! It is slops! I mean the coffee—cold and muddy. Why don’t you smoke?”

“Don’t you?” asked Lawrence, taking out his case.

“Seldom, except under protest—for the sake of good-fellowship; but, please, you go on. Will you have brandy, menthe, chartreuse, kümmel?”



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“Nothing just now, thanks.”

He was fumbling for his matches and yet wondering at himself—wondering why? And then it came to him! It was the memory of the pressure of another hand that had held him from replying; the swift recollection of another voice—another face—the face of another man’s wife!—the wife of his best friend!

“Can’t you find a light?” asked the widow evenly.

“Yes; I forgot I was going to smoke.”

“Let’s talk,” she said. “Do you know, I saw you the other day—walking with the rector of St. John’s. Something strange about him, isn’t there? He’s the living image of Marti, the actor. You and he are old friends.”

“The very best and oldest, if you mean Frank Bellwood.”

“I used to know him quite well a long time ago. I quite agree with some one who said that there were three sexes in the world—‘men, women, and clergymen’—one might almost include actors, too. . . . I suppose he told you he doesn’t approve of me?”

Lawrence was silent.

“He isn’t the only one; so that doesn’t matter!” she continued. “Do you know his wife? I saw her this morning. Of course, you do; how foolish! Do you know, I think she is one of the most beautiful creatures I ever saw. What a figure! What eyes, what color! And so youthful—she must be nearly thirty. And to think she’s had two children! That generally— She would be wonderful if she was only properly gowned and dressed—and had a chance. Somebody told me that she had attended a fashionable girls’ school in New York; did she?”



**“He turned and left her standing there.”**

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"She was there for three years, I think."

"Was she ever abroad?"

"Yes, six months in Europe, traveling with friends."

"Where were you then?"

"I was in college."

"They say Walter Smith, of Antioch, was awfully in love with her," insinuated Mrs. Ned.

"Indeed?"

"And he was not the only one," she mocked lightly, "was he?" She paused, but Lawrence made no reply, so she continued: "And to think of her having to spend her days in this poky place. It seems a crime! What a success she would have had! She looks *good*, too. She has that air about her that other women will not own up to envying. I'm sure she's cold. She's very good. Isn't she?"

"I hope so—I mean I'm sure of it." He was beginning to rebel at the trend of the questioning.

"I don't think I ever wanted to be good—no, no; I'm not good, Orlando!"

She leaned toward him, her hands clasped at her neck. Her eyes were searching him.

"That depends," said he.

"That's true," she replied; "it depends."

The rose fell from her hair; she picked it up, crushed it against her face, then threw it from her.

There was another pause. From the direction of Brimfield came the long, sonorous sound of the big bell in the tower, softened by the distance.

"Gracious!" cried Mrs. Ned. "Is it as late as that?"

"I'm afraid it must be."

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“There’s an electric button just inside the door; press it twice, they will understand,” motioned the widow. “Then come back to me.”

He rose, softly crossed the flags, and returned. She was standing now, looking thoughtfully out over the moonlit garden.

“I’m going to say good night to you here,” said she. “What are you doing to-morrow? I thought we might take the big car and go careering down to Maitland Springs for lunch. It’s only thirty miles. Or maybe the Country Club; that’s nearer.”

She touched his arm softly, slightly appealing to him by word and gesture.

“I’m afraid I can’t to-morrow.”

“What are you doing?”

“Well; I’m going to church in the morning.”

“Church!” echoed Mrs. Ned. “Well, well!”

“Don’t think I’m putting on godly airs,” explained Lawrence. “I’m not. In the abstract, I’d rather go automobiling; but I have an engagement afterwards.”

He was going to lunch at the rectory; he was going to see her! but he did not see fit to explain further.

“Oh, I understand. Good night, Orlando.”

“Good night, dear lady.”

It was a firm, kindly shake of the hand she gave him, and he turned and left her standing there, the moonlight all about her, the rose still lying on the stone pavement at her feet.

On the drive home he felt grateful somehow—grateful for something, he could not exactly fathom what. And yet again—he wondered.

## CHAPTER VI

### A PLEA FOR CHARITY

**L**AURENCE woke to see things clearly in the light of early dawn—his way lay plain in flight! But flight from what? The trite old saw about temptation came to his mind. Where was that indomitable will of his—that will that he had felt he might build upon so strongly! His faith was slightly shattered! Only the unexpected help from that intruding memory had held him the night before. In his unbiassed honesty he saw it so. And in that saving memory—that in a few short hours would become a living presence, a presence growing stronger day by day—lay his sure danger. Clear-headed, he acknowledged it.

Into his mind there flashed a sudden thought—the shadow of a thought, so mean, so cowardly, that it brought him up all-standing, as it were, upon the rock of his resolve. But he had cast it from him so quickly that it left no taint.

In the swift revulsion, he decided. He almost reveled in the task he set himself. His old belief came back—the old trust in his self-command, his captaincy of soul!

Frank Bellwood must live! He was an ill man, no doubt of it; but worse-behaved hearts than his had

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been helped by science, by careful treatment, and by strict *régime*. There was Nauheim, there was Sir Claude Munson, and there was himself. When he had wished he had always dominated Bellwood's will, and there was an ally he could count upon in Amy. How much she knew of her husband's condition he had no idea. But the old compact, forever binding, was in force; the truth at all times, between them, "always, always," as she had said—and she had his promise.

As he dressed he planned and weighed matters carefully. It must be done at once—to-day! Frank must be made to see his duty; he must give in to common sense. Lawrence conjured up convincing reasons to break down that absurd prejudice against receiving further aid. He rehearsed arguments that could not be answered, and, as he walked to church later, he went over them again.

St. John's was a pretty little edifice, albeit that it was glaringly new. When the vines, that now were sprouting a foot or two above the ground, should cover the tiny buttresses and the new-sown grass seed take a firmer hold on the little lawn, it might be quite beautiful. Bellwood had persuaded the architect to copy the well-known little English church at Wryburne, and the result was pleasing. The windows were not all of stained glass—only one was in fact, the memorial to the wife of old Esterbrook, the mill owner—but the gray and red paint that covered the lozenge panes made no bad apology, and the oaken pews and the well-balanced choir and chancel lent an air of age and dignity that spelled comfort to the parishioners, even if they suggested a bit obtrusively the unpaid mortgage.

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The bells were ringing from all the churches in Brimfield—from the First Congregational, from the Baptist, the Methodist, and the Roman Catholic down the river. The streets were crowded with vehicles, and the sidewalks with people. Lawrence, as he hurried on, passed Ellery Slocum, Mrs. Slocum, the little Slocums, and the married daughter. Ellery wore his Sunday suit, and was chewing a palpable peppermint drop to conceal the strong evidence of not having forgotten his morning horn. They were all bound for St. John's.

Before the door were standing groups of young people gossiping, and a few carriages, with long-tailed horses, for Brimfield was not a fashionable place and claimed no notice in the society columns of the daily press; yet on Sundays people came from Kenton Falls, from the neighboring hotels—even from Antioch.

As Lawrence entered the vestibule, Amos Barton, the sexton, who was ringing the bell from a niche on one side of the entrance, nodded to him, and a minute later beckoned with his head to Mr. Slocum. Ellery joined him. The rest of the Slocums rustled down the aisle toward the family pew.

"Look and see who's in church!" panted Mr. Barton, as he gave a downward swing at the bell rope.

"Who?" asked Ellery, swallowing the last of the peppermint drop.

"Look and see," rejoined the sexton, this time reaching upward. "I gave her the seat she wanted—over there in the corner on the left."

Mr. Slocum entered hurriedly and stood transfixed! There sat Mrs. Ned Rice in a large and very becoming hat, fanning herself with an ordinary palm-leaf fan, like a common, everyday churchgoer, and looking quite as



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much at home—which meant betraying a lively interest in every new arrival.

Lawrence, not having been warned of the startling presence, did not notice her, and Mrs. Ned, having chosen the farthest seat in the darkest corner, was apparently unobserved by the majority of the congregation, who now poured in as the bell stopped ringing and the young organist began to play a somewhat vacuous march, evidently, from his rapt expression, of his own immediate composing.

As Lawrence appeared, Mrs. Rice had hesitated between two impulses: one was to cough and attract his attention, the other to hide behind the palm-leaf fan that she had picked out of the rack in front of her. The result was, womanlike, she did neither, but gazed fixedly at the young man at the organ who was glancing alternately from one foot to the other, as if to make sure they were properly attached to his person. Thus Mrs. Ned missed seeing the effect of her presence upon the astonished Mr. Slocum.

Kellogg's pew was on the main aisle, and from it he could watch Mrs. Bellwood and the two children who sat in front of him on the side aisle near the corner of the chancel. They were entering from the vestry room at the very moment he took his seat.

Amy was one of those women who animate their personal belongings with a particular individuality. From her simple but well-fitting gray gown to her flower-crowned hat, everything she put on seemed to suggest herself, to become her perfectly. Richer stuffs might enhance the value of what she wore; but the values, never. The unobtrusiveness of her framing, so to speak, made more striking her qualities of face and

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figure. Mrs. Rice's criticism of her gowning, Lawrence had thought not only severe but ill merited. Amy needed neither rich laces nor costly jewels, as adornments, any more than she needed rouge or powder; if she had possessed the wealth of a princess she could have disregarded them and held her own by the very distinction of her presence. She had a serene, un-studied grace, from her walk to her slightest movement. The poise of her head was exquisite.

As the two children preceded her into the pew, Lawrence feasted his eyes on the picture, and his heart leaped. He loved her children! They seemed inseparably connected with his love for Amy. In the mysterious charm of her motherhood he seemed to feel a deeper, holier affection. The spiritual domination of his soul was mingled with the natural instinct for paternity. He craved the touch of little hands, the clinging trust of childish hearts. The direct, unvoiced demand for protection, for understanding sympathy, appealed to the strongest and to the simplest part of his nature. They were beautiful children! The boy had his father's clear-cut features, only broader and less delicate, perhaps; there was a boldness in his brow, under the brown curls, that his father lacked, a sturdier set to his upright little shoulders. The girl was like her mother, even to the poise of her head and the luminous depths of her steady gray eyes. Without any overtures they had given him manifold tokens of childish trust and affection, admitting him to the freemasonry of their comradeship.

The service began. The rector was a wonderful reader. His voice was musical without singsong, level without monotony. The slight affectation of his school

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had developed into a mannerism that was rather pleasing than otherwise. It was artistic, it fitted well to the grand old English of the prayer book, it cadenced properly with the psalms and lessons. It was a pleasure to listen to him. Bellwood, who disdained the use of his glasses during service, looked well, also, in stole and surplice. He was priest all through, from his bent form at the altar steps to his gesture of benediction. He might have stepped from the cloisters of an old-time monastery, fresh from some devoted task of illumination, with his pale, ascetic face and his exalted, soulful air; or, cowled and sandaled, he might have followed with his brethren, genuflecting, in procession to some shrine. Modern he was not; the ancient forms of things became him, dignified him, as old costumes and ancient forms become and dignify some distinctive types of men. He betrayed in the pulpit none of the self-consciousness, the nervous shyness he showed in everyday surroundings. He displayed unsuspected power; he almost rose to the heights of inspiration. But it was the hectic fever, not the natural heat of zeal.

The choir was singing the offertory anthem. Kellogg was claiming the advantages of the position offered by his seat; his eyes were dwelling on Amy and his thoughts were also. He was unconscious that another pair of eyes were on him, following his look and marking his expression. Mrs. Rice was smiling to herself—a smile that changed from one of startling discovery to one of assured conviction. Perhaps the lady she had appreciated and criticised was not so “cold” as she had thought her, after all! At that moment, from the intensity of Lawrence’s gaze, perhaps, Amy

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turned and looked at him. Mrs. Rice was as excited as if at a play. She moved, leaning sideways, to see the better. Then suddenly she was sorry she had done so. Whether it was the sweep of the long-plumed hat, or the fact that she had dropped the palm-leaf fan, that had attracted attention, it made no matter. Mrs. Bellwood had seen her! Without a change in her expression she had turned back to the chancel.

Bellwood was just entering the little pulpit. He looked paler than usual; his lips were moving in prayer as he paused before he gave out his text. He unfolded no sermon, carried no notes, announced no reference.

“ ‘And the eyes of the blind man were opened, and he saw.’ ”

The words were spoken almost in a whisper; the mystery of the miracle seemed to live in them. The awed announcement of the simple fact was thrilling.

Quietly, but intensely, he went on. He described the blind; the groping hands, the death of all hope of ever greeting dawn, of feeling freedom. And from the cloud upon the mind, the body, he merged into the cloud upon the soul, the hampered, darkened soul, as pitiful, as hopeless, as constrained—but far less patient, so much more prone to suffering—so keen to feel the galling sense of the imprisonment.

He lived his words, and as he came to the awakening his own eyes opened as if he saw and welcomed life. He expanded in a burst of gratitude. His face took on a radiance of thankfulness; he praised the living moment, gloried in the awakening truth. He seemed to feel the falling chains, the release of the binding fetters; he almost leaped into the sunlight of his hope.

Lawrence had never ceased to watch him. Under-

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neath the swiftly forming words he saw the actual suffering, the torment of mind and body. The white, slender hand grasped over that throbbing, ill-tuned heart, alarmed him; the swaying of the slight figure meant much to him; the physical man would pay for the license allowed the spiritual expression. Many moments of this kind were bad for Bellwood's chances. The reaction would surely come. Lawrence almost prepared for it—he anticipated the sure collapse.

He stole a look at Amy; her face was pale; in her eyes, that were on her husband, was a note of fear.

Mrs. Rice, from her corner, was leaning forward, both elbows on the back of the empty pew before her; she was enjoying a keen sensation. Half fascinated, she looked on, as if at some drama—the delineation of some living tragedy. The emotional side of her nature was pulsating in sheer enjoyment. She saw the beautiful face, transfigured in its ecstasy, she heard that wonderful, pervading voice; a tremor almost shook her, but it was not the words that reached and touched her. Again it was the man, the suffering, living man! Once she cast a swift glance at Lawrence and at Amy, then back to Bellwood. This time a great pity for him rose within her, and, such was her peculiar nature, she felt a strange sense of coming tears.

Bellwood had stopped. His eyes, with the light still in them, swept over the silent congregation. Lawrence almost stirred at his next words, so unexpected were they, so close to his own recent thoughts. There was no sign of weakness, no hint of the dreaded prostration. His tones were firm, his accents filled with a sweet, convincing force. Almost as in relief, the words

## A PLEA FOR CHARITY

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were quiet, well sustained; yet underneath them lay the strange, appealing power.

“The Touch will come to you, perhaps to-day—not here—you’ve felt it—to-day as you awoke! For all of us the early waking hours possess peculiar qualities; the mind seems more alert to judge the actual. The moral eye lifts to view life, uncolored, undisturbed by imagination or surroundings, to see it as it is! The nude soul, judging clearly, unerringly, hears also, in prophecy, its sentence. There has been no time for argument, excuse, extenuation; no time for self-applause. All who waste life’s chances, all who stand unforgiven, unabsolved of the living sin, burdened by the wrong unrighted, can see the dreaded debit column loom large in the pages of the Book! The choking fingers of remorse clutch at the heart, only to be relaxed by the interposing hands of new resolves; resolves strengthened by an appeal for clemency, for help and fortitude to stand the test of absolute confession! Confession to thy God, to thyself, and to thy brother, to whom belongs the restitution—the truth, the right, long, long withheld!”

His voice thrilled again, his whisper lifted in pleading tones, then sank to swift entreaty.

“Confess thy sin! Confess! And in the measure of thy newborn sight—beseech forgiveness!”

He turned for the final sentence to the cross in the big memorial window. The words were hardly audible, the upraised hand trembled slightly. As the congregation left the bent figure still knelt at the altar rail.

To his relief, when Lawrence joined Bellwood in the little vestry room, there was no sign of either reaction or collapse. The minister was yet in a strange,

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCES

exalted mood. His eyes shone with the luster of spiritual excitement; the replies to his friend's few words of congratulation were almost incoherent. He moved slowly, as if dazed. He acted like the man he had described, the man who had regained his sight, the sentenced one who had obtained his pardon.

At the door, Amy, who had sent the children ahead, was waiting alone. She looked from Lawrence to her husband, questioning them both with anxious eyes.

"I was afraid he had overtaxed himself," she said at last. "He was not well this morning, and he had a bad night—he sleeps so little."

She took her husband's arm, but looked at Lawrence steadily, hiding the fear that was back of her slowly spoken words.

"But I'm going to do much better now," said Bellwood, smiling faintly. "I am going to be much better. Larry, here, is going to take me in hand. Perhaps he will make a new man of me."

"We'll see what we can do, Frank."

"Yes, yes—good, good—you know you're going to spend the day with us. Come, let's be walking on. Oh, I hope no one is going to stop me, to speak to me—I'm afraid they will."

"We can go back through the gap in the hedge," suggested Mrs. Bellwood, "and across through Bartop's garden; we did it once before."

She turned and led the way about the corner of the church; Lawrence followed. They passed through the scraggly evergreens, opened a little gate and, following a path that led through lines of currant bushes and garden patches, came to a narrow lane.

## A PLEA FOR CHARITY

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Bellwood took Kellogg's arm and walked between him and Amy silently. Somehow he had surrendered himself to the idea that they were guiding him.

No one spoke. Lawrence felt as if, by the very silence, he was being initiated into the innermost secrets of the lives of the two who walked beside him. He could not speak his thoughts just then; to launch into some commonplace would have been almost a transgression of their intimate relations. But Bellwood needed rousing; his eyes had gone lack-luster, his step was unsteady.

Amy glanced across at Lawrence as if to read his mind. Her face was pale, but again she controlled the fear that welled within her.

"Frank, Frank," she said bravely, "did you see who was in church?"

She repeated the question, shaking the minister's elbow.

"Who? Oh, yes; the people from Antioch, you mean. They were there again."

Bellwood was exerting his will, controlling himself with an effort.

"No; somebody else—somebody more surprising. Mrs. Rice, from Elmside!"

Bellwood lifted his head, his interest, for the instant, thoroughly alive.

"Mrs. Rice was there; did you ask her to come?" He turned to Lawrence suddenly.

"No, Frank; I had no idea of it. I didn't see her."

"He dined there last night," said Bellwood to his wife. "Probably you spoke about me, eh?" Again he addressed himself to Kellogg.



## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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“Your name was mentioned casually. I told her you were my best and oldest friend.”

Bellwood grasped his arm tightly but replied nothing. The trancelike expression returned to his face again. Amy made no further attempt to rouse him; something that had been said had turned her thoughts. Not a word was spoken until they reached the end of the grassy path. They would soon be meeting people on the road.

“Let’s wait here a minute and get our breath; we’ve been going quite a pace,” said Lawrence quietly.

As they had walked down the lane he had been forming his opinion. A new complication had risen in the last half hour. Why he had not guessed how matters stood before he could not have told. It seemed to be plain enough to read, taking it all in all. And a great deal was accounted for in his belated discovery. Before the day was over they would be on even ground; it depended upon how he approached the subject whether the handling of it would be difficult or easy. At all events he felt the relief of the surgeon, about to operate, who has been spared the danger and worry of hazardous exploration. The new complication was specific and tangible, and he was saved, also, from the delicate necessity of being secretive in a direction where it might have pained him to be so. Amy knew everything without his telling her. This was the reason! Now he understood the change in her. The mystery was explained; it was the constant air of being on her guard—on guard for another’s sake!

They had paused for a minute or so in the shade of a big apple branch that stretched from a neighbor-

## *A PLEA FOR CHARITY*

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ing garden. Bellwood had removed his broad-brimmed hat and was mopping his forehead.

"Now we're quite right," he said, "and when I get home a little nap and a rest will set me on my feet again. I'm sorry to be such a bother!"

Completely himself, to every outward appearance, he started down the street, disdaining all assistance and walking strongly. Amy and Lawrence fell in beside him, neither speaking, both watching him.

Before they had gone a dozen yards, a short, thick-set figure slouched out of an alleyway near the livery stable. It was Pat Tevelin, a depressed-looking setter at his heels. He paid no attention to Bellwood, but, seeing who was with him, he lifted his cap and stood respectfully to one side as the others passed.

At last they reached the rectory. The minister did not pause to return the greeting of the two children who met them at the gate. Hurriedly he passed in first and entered the house. The little ones, now tugging at Lawrence's fingers, were dismissed to wait in the back garden until they were called; then he and Amy followed into the narrow front hall. Bellwood was already at the head of the stairs.

"I'm going to lie down," he called; "don't let me be disturbed till luncheon, please."

"But, Frank," said Lawrence, "I want to talk with you."

"Not now; later, later." There followed the shutting of a door and the sound of a key softly turning in the lock.

Alone in the study they faced each other. She waited patiently for him to speak.

"You know what the trouble is, Amy?"

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She looked at him puzzled, striving to overcome the sudden desire to hide her own knowledge behind his, to put off the bitter moment of divulgence!

“I do—and I don’t; tell me.”

“He has heart trouble; he has had it a long time. You know that, of course?”

“Yes.”

“He is taking something—some drug. Do you know what?”

“No; you must ask him. He intends to tell you everything to-day—to confess it all. I’m sure of it.”

He loved her the better for her loyalty; he loved her the better for her shielding devotion. But even at the risk of cruelty he must pursue his questions. He must be armed with facts.

“How long has this been going on?”

She winced. “Two or three years—perhaps longer. On one occasion he— At times I think he stopped—he’s fought hard truly. No one knows of it.”

“You did.”

“I pretended not to—not to understand. There was no one I could go to. It seemed the best way to help him. You see, he would not let me suppose that it was conquering, for fear that if I knew I might lose hope with him. I wished to hope—I wished to think he still had strength! He— Oh, you must find out from him—all, everything. Oh, how I prayed for you to come; you were the only one. Mind you, I would not ask too much; but I do not want to be deceived. I would not have him feel that he—you, had to—keep it from me now.”

“I would tell you everything—the truth—always; anything you might wish to know.”

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She looked up at him, and gazed deep in his eyes unflinchingly a moment, her lips parting.

"I believe you might," she said slowly. "I believe you would."

"Surely you trust me."

"But of yourself, what would you tell?"

"All my hopes, my fears, my sins if you asked them."

"Your own troubles, your own sorrows?"

"Yes—but, why?"

"You are sharing mine," she murmured, still looking at him. "You are making my burden yours. I wonder if—if you would misunderstand——?"

She paused as she spoke, irresolutely, and then swiftly crossed the room. From the lower drawer of the bookcase she took an old silken bag full of odds and ends; at the bottom she found the thing she was searching for. Claspng it in both hands she brought it to him and laid it on the desk.

It was a small photograph, evidently the work of an amateur, of a group of three: a man with a little infant in his lap, and a young woman bending over him, watching. They were seated on the ground with flowers and trees about them.

Where had that picture come from? The day, the place, came back!—the old days in Vienna! The excursions along the banks of the Danube. The smiling bearded figure was himself. The woman——

"Trust me. Tell me about her, Lawrence."

Suddenly an icy chill swept over him, succeeded by a hot rush of blood from heart to brain. It was all clear! The curtain that hid the puzzling past lifted. He understood. He clutched the desk; he dared not

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raise his eyes. He must think—think! Everything was changing in this instant! Somehow his perturbation seized on Amy; she bent forward to look him in the face.

“Tell me, Lawrence; tell me—is it true? Or is it all, all——”

She stopped, her voice hoarse and weak with fright and horror. The fabric of her life seemed ready to tumble about her shoulders, the castles of her faith were tottering! The future—oh, the black future! what would it rear?

“Who told you anything of this? Who told you? How did you find it out?”

His words rang with bitterness, almost with anger.

In her great onswEEP of relief that was so evident, she could not give an answer; the sudden, killing doubt, dispelled so swiftly by his words and attitude, left her dumb and shaking. There was silence between them. A big ant scuttled across the papers on the desk; its swiftly moving legs made an audible trace of sound. A fly, wing-tied in a web among the vines at the window, buzzed despairingly; the clatter of table-setting came from the dining room beyond the hall; the old stairway creaked; the deep breathing silence seemed unending.

“What do you know of this, Amy? Where did it come from?” He had quieted his voice; it was more sad now than angry, but it quivered under his effort of self-control. He must find out more. But above all he must be strong!

“Don’t think Frank told me—no, no. Mother got the picture—some one sent it to her; some one who knew a fellow-student of yours; she showed it to me,

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and then—ah! you might have told me, Larry. I would have understood!”

“Yes, but I— Pardon me, please go on.”

“And then I wormed the story out of Frank; he was living with us then. Forgive me; mother told me to go to him; she insisted—she demanded that I should. It was just after you—you stopped writing. He denied it at first, but when he saw I knew—I mean, that I understood—he only defended you; truly he did. . . . Tell me, Lawrence; did you, did you—love her?”

“Very much.”

He spoke with closed eyes, standing erect.

“Where is she?”

“I don’t know. Don’t ask me any more.”

He bent his head this time. Amy put her hand on his shoulder. Her low voice seemed to caress, with its sweet chord of sympathy, yet it thrilled with the overtones of even deeper feeling.

“Poor Larry! I am only asking because—because I—ah, I cannot help it! I have longed so to ask; I have dreamed of asking. I felt that you might tell me—might like to. The child, is it alive? Ah, don’t—” She recoiled, drawing back, as if from bad, heart-breaking news.

“The child is alive—in Vienna.”

“I should love to see your child, Lawrence—some day; perhaps I may.” Her very soul seemed speaking in her tenderness.

He raised his hand and clasped the fingers that were still on his shoulder.

“God bless you, Amy,” he said. “God bless you, dear—good friend!”

Her grasp replied. She gazed at him—long after

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he turned away. There came the faintest quiver of a sob in her throat. Then she tried to speak, as he looked at her again; but her drawn lips only responded with the smile that holds back tears. Her eyes were shining wet, as she drew her hand from his.

Some one came down the stairway, just outside the door.

“Will Dr. Kellogg come up and see Mr. Bellwood, ma’am?” faltered the nursery maid, from the lower step.

“Go!” said Amy. “Be good to him. Let us work together to pull him through; he needs your help—we need it—both of us. God bless and help you! Save him, Lawrence.”

There was no entreaty, no supplication; only a physician, in his line of duty, urged to do his best.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONFESSION

**T**HE most pitiful sight in all the world is a beseeching human soul groveling for mercy, in the depths of just self-condemnation—pitiful because it excites less pity in man's breast than suffering bravely faced. Sympathy is so mingled with contempt, the forgiveness of the injured one so mingled with distrust, that it takes a lofty spirit to extend, unfalteringly, the merciful, uplifting hand. Confession, noble in the abstract, may be almost stultifying in its act of cowardice. The very weakness of nondefense may be its strongest plea; but after the reaping, it requires strong handling of the weakened soil to grow the crop of self-respect, strong evidence of purpose to convince belief in him who shares the unsought burden.

As Lawrence mounted the creaking stairs, all his past affection for Frank Bellwood shook off him like some foul, contaminated garment, long worn in ignorance. If it were not for the woman waiting down below, he could have burst in the door and crushed him, slaying him with reproaches! Not only because he felt he had been robbed, but because it had now been forced upon him to be a party to the robbery. Yet it was of his own free will that he had steeped himself in the



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consequence of the initial wrong; there had been no self-argument, no hesitation.

He was not so much stunned at the discovery of Bellwood's treachery, as sickened by the thought of it. His sense of injury, his anger, was swamped in his feeling of disgust; the base ingratitude revolted him. But the request she had made of him to save had sounded, unknown to her, an imperative demand to spare, not only the wretched traitor, but herself. No matter the cost; he could not disregard that unvoiced plea.

Lawrence knocked hurriedly; the door was unlocked; he entered. The minister lay on the bed, his face in the pillows. He glanced up, frightened.

"You wished to see me, Frank?"

"Larry, Larry," exclaimed the craven, stretching out both hands. "Help me; oh, help me! I am hopeless—my misery is hopeless! I am lost unless you help—unless——"

He rose and would have knelt, but Kellogg stayed him and pushed him back upon the bed, on the edge of which he sat writhing, with straining fingers clasped between his knees. The friend who had once held such undoubting faith stood above him, unbending, unpitying.

"Now, out with it, out with it! Keep quiet, don't go on that way! From the beginning—everything! And—be a man!"

He was not sure what confession might come first, or whether one would come at all; but he spoke the last words with a conscious effort, as if aware of their re-echoing mockery.

"I will not help you speak," he went on, for a

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groan was the only reply from the cowering figure. "But I will tell you simply this: I will help you live! That is my duty—that I will do—must do!"

"I do not want to live! God help—forgive me! I want to die!"

Lawrence gazed down at him.

"No more of that, I ask. Begin."

"I don't know how!" The abject voice prayed brokenly, its owner rocking from side to side.

"Come, come; we waste time."

Bellwood dropped his head lower and at last, as if in desperation, he blurted out short speeches, each following fast upon the other, with a caught breath in between.

"I have wronged you, Lawrence, robbed you. . . . I was weak. I could not resist temptation. . . . I betrayed you! I took advantage of a cursed circumstance—I slowly allowed a deception to take place—I fostered it at last. I did not build it—I swear to you—it came ready to my hand—in a moment of great weakness I lied—I worse than lied! Oh, how I've suffered——"

"That goes without saying! How did you lie?"

To save himself he could not help giving the torturing screw a turn. For the first time Bellwood looked at him.

"I loved Amy—loved her ever since she was a little girl. But I had no chance, no hope. When you and she were together——"

"Pray leave that out."

"I cannot—when she and you were together, I used to go mad, mad with jealousy. I envied you—I hated you. I felt that if you had married her, I should have

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died. You went away—you were not engaged—she was not pledged. I did not think you loved her as I did. I—” He paused and then went on hurriedly: “After my father’s death I went to live with the Winters. I saw her every day. It grew to be torture—Mrs. Winter found out. She pitied me; she liked me. She thought you would never be coming back—and I agreed. She said that you would never live here—I agreed again, although I seldom spoke of you. She implored Amy never to leave her. She was afraid that if—that if she went away, she would never see her again. . . . Do you remember a letter you wrote me describing the gay life of the students, their license, their temptations?—and how you had been tempted, once, yourself; and how——”

“Yes, I remember all that—you showed it to Amy?”

“No, I showed it to her mother—she did.”

“Well, go on.”

“I fell very ill; Amy nursed me. One day as I was recovering she brought me a photograph—of you and a woman, and a child. I don’t know what became of it—you were sitting——”

“I remember the photograph and all about it—well?”

“Some one had sent it to Mrs. Winter—I’ll tell you who—Mrs. Sprague, mother of Sprague of our class—he was with you in Vienna—he had written home a lot of gossip——”

“Damn him,” said Lawrence. “Pardon me—don’t stop.”

“Amy asked me if I knew anything. I denied any knowledge—I denied it.” Bellwood was breathing

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hard, his voice, weak and hoarse, had the thirsty rattle of a burning fever. "She pressed me, appealed to me—and then the temptation came—I could not face it. I tried to tell her how things were different over there—of how young men lived—I let her think I *knew*—I asked her not to write to you."

Lawrence was bending over him, his muscles stiffened in his folded arms; but at last he filled the long pause with a question spoken low.

"And she?" he asked, with no change in his attitude.

"She said nothing—she went away. After that I had a relapse—I was very ill—afterwards her mother fell ill, too. And——"

"You kept my letters from her?" There was a menace in the other's tone this time; his fingers flexed. The mean cowardice of the trite, age-worn expedient struck him as he repeated the question again, more slowly this time.

"No, I did not—as God is my witness as a sinner, I did not! You seemed to stop writing. When I began to get well they told me she had nursed me back. I tried to thank her and, almost forgetting—for it was like a dream—I told her that I loved her—and—and she accepted me. O God, forgive me! I know you never can!"

"Hush! How much did you know about that story, about that woman in the photograph?"

"Nothing."

"I can forgive you; what you said was true!"

The effect of the words was startling, because the words carried no effect at all! If Kellogg had expected them to clear the situation, to save the future

## **THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE**

of some difficulties, he was mistaken. Again Bellwood looked up at him.

“No, no,” he cried. “It was not true! Don’t lie! Don’t make me take up a deeper shame; don’t give me your honor as you would give me my life! It would not mend matters—curse me, curse me, if you like!” He drew his handkerchief across his lips.

Lawrence was cornered. The words were so sincere that, for the first time, real pity was uppermost. He softened.

“All right,” he said; “there was no other woman—up to then there had been no other in my life. The woman in the picture was the mistress of a friend; although I was with them often, and people may have talked, she was nothing to me. The child belonged to some peasants out for a holiday. There is that story, the whole of it. I intended to deceive you—not for your sake, but for your wife’s. But this is not all—there’s something else. Don’t be afraid.”

“Oh, I wish I had died, died, died,” reiterated Bellwood, shaking in a spasm of mental agony. “Promise me that if I do, you will marry Amy and take care of the children—promise me, Lawrence.”

“You will not die; you’ve got to live.”

“To live and suffer more! What shall I do?”

“I will tell you that—after you tell me the rest.”

“What do you mean?”

“The drug you are taking—what is it?”

“Drug?”

Bellwood was on the defensive now. A new phase of the strange interview had arisen, but one that Lawrence was expecting, was well prepared for. He turned to the tall, old-fashioned chest of drawers in the cor-

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ner; from the keyhole of a little compartment hung a bunch of keys on a silver ring. The compartment was unlocked; he opened it.

"It is only some sedative, something to quiet my nerves—something to help me sleep," began Bellwood, faltering.

"So I see. You first began with this patent nostrum, eh?—and increased the dose—it was guaranteed harmless."

"Yes; it seemed to relieve me."

"Of course it did."

The matter-of-fact manner was reassuring; the tone was almost soothing. Insensibly Bellwood was influenced; his mood changed, the hunted, frightened look began to disappear.

One after another the doctor picked up empty boxes—and then some small half-empty vials. In one was a powder, in another some little pellets, a third held flat, white tablets.

"Your heart must be stronger than I supposed; you should feel much encouraged, Frank!"

"Encouraged?"

"Yes; you intend to stop all these some day, eh, don't you? You seem to have run the gamut. When did you begin with this nerve tonic, this sedative?"

"About three years ago."

"These other things came later? You denied to Amy you were taking anything, of course? She must have asked you."

"Yes, no—but——"

"Taken one this morning? More than one, didn't you?"

"Yes; before service I felt very bad."

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"I thought so."

"Perhaps I've been taking them too frequently; you're quite right, I intend to stop to-day."

Lawrence closed the lock of the compartment quickly and tossed the keys on the bed. He was thoroughly convinced that during the last few minutes, even while he was talking, Bellwood had managed to slip something to his lips; but it made no matter, probably it was best for the moment. The minister was calm and rational now, no doubt feeling the promise of the relaxing nerves, the approach of the soothing brain waves. He sat up, smoothing back his hair.

"Some time this week or next, Frank, you and I are going off for a little trip," said Lawrence casually, leaning on the window sill and talking over his shoulder, "and when you return you won't know yourself, I take it. You won't need any more of this stuff after a while. Let me tell you, the end of it is death or the madhouse. And you must win back your wife's belief"—he had almost said "respect"—"in you. Think of her, can't you? How she must have suffered; she knows!"

"Did she tell you?"

There were signs of impatience in Kellogg's face. "No; I told *her*. About that other matter, that is an affair between you and myself—it concerns me mostly; it's past and gone—and over. Never on your life must you breathe it to a living soul!"

"That will be part of my cross," said Bellwood slowly. "I've carried it long now." The histrionic sincerity of his pulpit voice sounded there.

"Call it that if you like. I told you that if you still think you wronged me—I forgive you."

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He was wondering what he was going to say to Amy! Their relations were altered! He had broken the compact of honest outspokenness between them. For the future he would have to play a part. He knew her abhorrence of a lie, implied or spoken. But lies are things that destroy! In the deception he had practiced lay the only hope of building up her faith in her husband, a faith that he could see was wavering. The downfall of it he believed would mean the complete downfall of her hopes of happiness. Never for an instant could he bring himself to doubt her love for this man who had robbed him. He only wondered at it, with a dumb unquestioning pity, but never could he help to undermine it. God preserve him from the thought of that!

The relief the interview had afforded Bellwood was evident—he was like another man. Already he was putting his own sensations into words, balancing phrases, choosing turns of speech. The cross upon his shoulder irked him little. As his exaltation grew, he almost forgot the degradation he had just passed through. The horror of being discovered, found out, in all the squalor of his soul, was gone. The haunting dread of becoming more and more a slave to the alluring panaceas that in his self-deceiving mind he called “sedatives,” “palliatives,” “tonics,” anything but what he knew they represented—Vice! *That* dread began to dwindle! More and more he began to lean on Kellogg’s promised aid; he would have accepted anything in the rebound of his release. But he had tact enough to feel that now was not the time for a display of gratitude. And for that, although he did not know it, his mentor, guide, counselor—but friend



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no longer—thanked him from the bottom of his heart.

A knock came at the door; there had been so long a silence that both men started.

“Well?” asked the minister tremulously, hoping that it was not his wife, and wondering what he should say if it proved to be. “Who is it?”

“It’s me, sir,” returned the voice of the young maid servant. “Mr. Remsen Bache is here, sir; and lunch is ready.”

“We’ll be down in a moment,” said Lawrence, answering for him. Bellwood had gone to the glass and was examining his face as a woman might who feared showing the trace of tears.

“You go,” he said; “I’ll be with you right away.”

Lawrence left the room without a word. He was glad there was going to be an unexpected guest at luncheon—unexpected guests relieve awkward situations quite as often as they make them.

Alone, Bellwood stood for a moment irresolutely; then he picked up the bunch of keys and looked them over. One was broken short off; the other half remained in the lock where Kellogg had snapped it with a twist of his strong fingers! The minister sank down at the window in an attitude of prayer. His weakened will required the evidence of extraneous aid to help him withstand the insidious temptation. The evidence was there! Help was forthcoming! His own words in the morning’s sermon came flooding back to him. He had confessed. Confessed all that was necessary for anyone to know! What he had held back concerned no one but himself—his poor weak self—be

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could put it to one side—he could add it to that cross he had to carry and no one would be the wiser! Even to himself he was like the spendthrift, given a chance by an insistent guardian, who finds it impossible to submit an exact account of his debts. He could not be sincere.

There were three things he had not told—to the telling of which he could not have brought himself. One was that from the stairway he had overheard the talk between Amy and Lawrence in the study. He had heard the latter assume the shielding untruth that afterwards he had tried to force upon him also. The second was that he knew his wife no longer loved him—perhaps had never loved him really. She had pitied him, had tried her best, had cared for and strengthened him, had been a good mother to his children; but now, since three years—he glanced at the broken key in the lock—she had been only his helpmate, his protecting, uncomplaining friend. Lastly—and here he would have denied his own convictions, if he could—he knew one other thing that was his alone to know. But, despite everything, as he trusted in the tenets of his faith, he trusted her.

Calm and apparently collected, he descended the stairs.

The Rev. Remsen Bache was a young man some two years Bellwood's junior. He had a big nose, a long, lean face with a habit of working the muscles of his mouth when talking, a stiffening of the upper lip over his large front teeth, with accompanying contortions at the corners. He was very shortsighted and his light-blue eyes were watery. A natural tonsure,

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of which he was rather proud, adorned the back of his head, and his hollow cheeks and receding chin were ash blue from a closely shaven, heavy beard. Mr. Bache's manner differed according to his surroundings; he adopted an amusedly familiar air with his inferiors, a rapt attention with his bishop, and, with his equals—especially with laymen—a style of the anecdotal conversational that he considered extremely fetching. He believed himself, moreover, quite a wit, and would range, in his monologic efforts, from tales suited to a corner of the smoke room to those suited to the side of an old maid's tea table. He had been a year at Oxford—from the effect of which he had never entirely recovered—and bleated fervently through his services, while he leaped from everyday topics to metaphysics in his sermons which he modestly denominated “little talks.”

So much nearly completes the foreword regarding Mr. Remsen Bache. He had one thing in common with Bellwood; that is, the “religiosity”—as a great English novelist has called it—that, with some types of men, supplies a large condiment in their preparation of religion. His mental attitude resembled that of a predestined, but unprepossessing, coquette—and was about as alluring.

It was a strange luncheon party. Lawrence sat with his back to the window opposite Mr. Bache; Bellwood at the head of the table; and Amy, with the children on either side of her, at the foot. From the beginning of the meal the visitor did most of the talking and all the entertaining, even condescending to do a trick with his napkin for the benefit of little Jack, who regarded him with grave and somewhat sus-

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piciously disapproving eyes. Amy was very silent, the minister *distrain*, and Lawrence kept up his feigned interest by an effort of his concentrated will. On Mr. Bache ambled:

“So we hear lots of things to-day, my dear Mrs. Bellwood! I was buttonholed by your husband’s devoted parishioner, Mr. Slocum, as I stepped off the trolley. I hope the dear, good Lord” (Mr. Bache was very familiar with the Deity) “will forgive me for riding on the trolley on the Sabbath; I firmly believe it is the invention of the devil, but it was the only way I could get here, and ‘needs must,’ you know. Well, I was held up, ‘stand and deliver’ fashion, by our well-intentioned gossiper, and told that the mountain had come to Mahomet! that Mrs. Ned Rice had appeared at the service at St. Johns! Perhaps she may be there again this afternoon! The next thing, my dear rector,” turning to Bellwood, “she will be in the thrall of your eloquence and joining the ‘Willing Workers’ or, perhaps, ‘The Little Mothers’—you know *that* story, don’t you?” (this to Lawrence) “Poor Catherine, she needs some spiritual influence in her life, a woman of her——”

“Do pardon me, Mr. Bache,” interrupted Amy, “but there is a very large fly fallen into your tea; won’t you let me give you another cup?”

Mr. Bache handed it over without looking for the offending insect, and would have gone on, but this time Lawrence took a hand in stopping him, inquiring about the facilities of the new trolley line, which launched the gentlemen into a dissertation on the time-table, the public indifference to proper service, and from that to the recent labor troubles. But this momentary di-

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version could not last. Before the meal was over Mr. Bache was once more back to the subject of Mrs. Ned.

“I hope the lady—who could be most useful, by the way, a thing we must not forget—profited by your sermon this morning, my dear Bellwood. From what I hear it was—er—most eloquent and—er—*most* convincing, and preached as if at some one directly. That is what tells, Dr. Kellogg—preaching *at* people, reaching for them, grasping them. My ‘little talks’ fall far short of the mark, I know; but it is my earnest endeavor to make at least one of my hearers the better, the stronger, for my poor halting words. . . . By the way, I understand the committee from the Church of the Incarnation were there again. I shouldn’t wonder, I shouldn’t wonder! Your congregation would hate to lose you, but duty calls us often to larger fields, harder work, to greater endeavor. Should you like Antioch, Mrs. Bellwood, do you think?”

Lawrence looked at Amy almost with tears of mingled anger and sympathy in his eyes. The thought of it! She having to live in this canting, soul-warping atmosphere! She, with her brains, her capacities, her true-ringing affections, her hatred of the small and the untruthful, the false, the narrow—hiding her secret tragedy all the time behind the poise of her self-command, the dignity of her long self-repression. How could she have stood it? How could she stand it now? Then for a moment her eyes met his; it seemed as if she had spoken, as if she had implored his help.

“I don’t think we shall leave Brimfield,” she said evenly. “Frank needs a long vacation before he thinks of harder work.” As she spoke she had risen and was pulling back the children’s chairs.

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"Bellwood is going away on a trip with me," broke in Kellogg. "That's all but arranged for."

"Indeed, indeed!" quoth Mr. Bache, as he rose from the table. "I more than envy him. Ah, the delight of traveling with a sympathetic soul!—the joy of it!"

Amy was already leading the little ones out of the room. Bellwood still sat in his seat, an exalted, far-away expression on his face. He was thinking over his address for the afternoon service; he was beginning to feel the effect of his own incipient inspiration.

"Come, Frank," called Kellogg. "Come along."

Bellwood rose with a nervous assumption of briskness and joined Mr. Bache. The two clergymen walked arm in arm into the study, but Lawrence, seeing Amy outside on the veranda, turned at the door and hastened out to join her.

They were beyond the view of the library windows; the children were down in the garden out of sight. Again, bravely, her glance met his; she almost leaned toward him. His spirit seemed to flow from him to meet hers halfway. Neither spoke.

With all the determination he could command he called that spirit back—controlled the impulse to voice the surging, clamoring cry of his swiftly beating heart. He lowered his eyes; almost he hated himself for the discovery he half feared he might have made—for the very suspicion of it! But the pause was quite as dangerous; the spell must be broken. He looked up again.

Amy had turned and was gazing out through the vines on which the leaves were crinkling under the touch of the early autumn. Her gray eyes were glistening with unshed tears, her marvelous beauty seemed

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enhanced by the outward signs of the shrouded, haunting trouble she would have hidden if she could.

“Did he tell you everything?” she asked, not moving.

“All, everything—he kept back nothing.”

“What will you do?” She brought out the question quietly, as if she believed already in the efficacy of any suggestion he might make.

“Do the best I can—take him away with me at once; I’ll save him—trust me.”

“Trust you?” she repeated. “Yes, as long as I live I’ll trust you. Thank you for helping me, to trust in—other things.”

“Oh, here you are! We wondered where you had gone to,” called the voice of Remsen Bache, from the doorway. “Bellwood went back into the garden to look. I don’t think anybody would see us if we smoked out here, eh?” He dragged up a chair.

Once more, as Amy passed him, Lawrence felt the reaching of that invisible hand, but the danger in touching it was over. The second warning, he believed, had made him doubly strong.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN THE PATH OF FATE

**J**UDGE HOLLINS sat at his ink-bespattered desk in his dingy private office, poring over some papers, when the telephone on the wall near the window rang shrilly. He rose and, putting his pen behind his ear, crossed over and took up the receiver. Like some people of most amiable dispositions his manner at the telephone was gruffly discouraging to prolonged conversation.

“Well?” he half grumbled, his voice rising. “Hello! hello! who is it? . . . I say, who is it? . . . What! My stars! this you, Lawrence? . . . Speaking from Three Ponds! . . . Yes, I hear you! . . . What! you don’t say so? Good Lord! you don’t think that—” A long pause. “Oh, you have. . . . Well! well! . . . Believe he took the train, eh? . . . No! they have no telephone. . . . Yes, I’ll have her here in half an hour. . . . Yes, I understand. I hear you plainly now. Probably started for home; where else would he go to? . . . All right! I’ll call you up in half an hour if I can’t find her. . . . Perhaps you’d better come on here. . . . Good-by.”

The judge hung up the instrument and stood looking at it over his glasses with an expression that was a mixture of awe and astonishment. “Well, well!” ex-



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claimed he to himself. "I wonder what has happened? There has been something going on that I don't understand."

He went back to the desk, picked up the big gold watch with the heavy fob, noted the time, compared it with the clock in the tower, and then, pulling on his cuffs and putting on his hat, walked out of the door with the pen still behind his ear.

A few minutes later he was at the gate of the rectory. He stood there irresolutely, gazing up and down the street for a full minute. Very often it had come to him, in the line of his profession, to be the bearer of tidings, good or bad, and he had found it better policy to begin with the shortest possible preamble. But here was a difficult case! He had absolutely no knowledge of how matters stood, and his friendship with Amy had been that of an old man with a woman he had known from childhood, whose beauty and character he had admired, but whose personality he had never come in contact with, and women were such erratic creatures that he could never tell what would be the best manner of approach—an explanation perhaps of his being still a bachelor. However, he had come for a purpose that must have a definite result. Swinging open the gate, he marched up the gravel path and knocked loudly on the front door, that was open, for the day was warm.

It was Amy who appeared from the little study on the right. She welcomed him with a smile and extended hand; but anxiety—that thinly spread out fear—showed plainly in her eyes.

"I was just going by," the judge began, looking beyond her into the hall, "and I thought— Are you alone this morning?" He removed his hat and the pen

## IN THE PATH OF FATE

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fell on the door sill. He was bending to pick it up, somewhat confused, when Amy reached swiftly and was before him.

"Come in, judge," she said. "I'm so glad—" Then suddenly her tone changed. "You have something to tell me." Her face had grown pale, but the words were spoken evenly. "There is no bad news, I hope. . . . No matter what it is—tell it your own way."

"No," said the judge, taking the pen from her fingers. "Lawrence called me up on the 'long distance' and wants to speak to you later. He thinks that Frank is on his way home. Seems to have left him—perhaps a little misunderstanding—or something."

"They've been away almost two weeks now. I expected he would soon grow tired of roughing it," Amy rejoined, her pallor showing that she was still keeping herself under strong control. "You say Lawrence wishes to speak to me? Tell me, so far as you know, what has happened."

They were still standing in the study. Hearing some one moving outside the door, Amy softly closed it.

"Now, please go on." Her gray eyes studied the judge's face. "When did he leave?"

"I know very little. It seems that last night, some time, Frank took one of the boats and rowed away from the camp without saying anything to Lawrence. Of course, at first, he was frightened, but soon found he had taken the trail to Three Ponds, and that there somebody answering his description had boarded the morning train. But if you will come over to my office he will call me up at 12.30."

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

"We'd better be going, then," said Amy. "But first I must tell you that Lawrence induced Frank to go with him much against his will. He has not been well—has not been himself. It was I who really persuaded him."

"I hope it has been nothing serious," said the judge.

Again he was surprised at Amy's reply.

"Yes, it is quite serious. I intend to ask Lawrence to tell you. Perhaps we may need your help."

"You may call upon me, my dear." The judge, in a fatherly manner, put his hand on Amy's that rested on the desk.

"That I knew without your telling me," she replied quietly.

The judge noticed that tears were in her eyes as she walked beside him down the street. Before they had reached the corner a big red automobile flashed by through the dust. He recognized Mrs. Rice and, sitting beside her, his enemy, Mr. Murger, so he took out his watch and looked at it fixedly as an excuse for not bowing. It lacked but a few minutes of the half hour.

Lawrence Kellogg sat waiting in the central office at Three Ponds, his eyes following the hands of the clock. The disappointment at the total failure of his efforts to reclaim Frank Bellwood rankled him. It had been as he partly suspected! The case was one of a complex character. He had known of such before. Absolute seclusion, constant watching, every minute, would be the only means of breaking the hold of the insidious vice. Bellwood, despite his promises, had deceived him—bitterly had he regretted that soul-wither-

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ing confession! Only two days before Lawrence had found and confiscated his hidden supply of morphine, and since then the minister's conduct had been that of a sick and sulky child. There was no use of appealing to his moral forces, they were absolutely dead.

That he would attempt to throw off the scent anyone who tried to follow him, was evident. But where was he going? Lawrence could not answer the self-asked question.

Suddenly the manager of the office informed him that he had Brimfield on the wire.

Lawrence closed the door of the booth behind him. How he should open the conversation he did not know. He doubted if Amy had said much in the way of explanation to the judge, and he was wondering what he would soon be thinking of the whole affair, not knowing that the old gentleman, after handing her the receiver, had left Amy alone—when all at once he heard her voice. It was clear and firm. As usual she asked him to tell her everything. So he started simply with the facts. He told her at what time he had first discovered Frank's disappearance, and the hour that the express had left the Three Ponds Station with him as a passenger.

In response to his questions she had replied that once, two years previously, Bellwood had disappeared for a week, an absence that she had explained to his friends and parishioners in some way of her own. She had ever maintained it as a secret. What had happened between her husband and herself on that occasion she did not vouchsafe to say, but she gave Lawrence the name of a hotel in Albany, the letter head of which she had found in the rectory study shortly

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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after his return. Undoubtedly Bellwood would go there again; at least the clew was worth following. So he told her that he would go on to Albany—probably the mysterious source from which Bellwood received his drug supply—by the next train and report from there by telegraph. The words that prefaced the perfunctory “good-by” were almost a repetition of words she had used once before, upon an occasion that he never should forget: “God bless you, Lawrence—find him and save him if you can!”

He could hear the slight tremble in the clear, even voice; he could imagine how she looked as she spoke! How brave she was—how loyal! There was hardly an hour of the day that he did not think of her, never a night but his dreams were filled with her presence. His one comfort was that he was serving—the mere feeling that she had trusted him—was his sole reward. Her blessing was the unseen scarf he wore upon his arm. The nobility of her character, the loftiness of her soul inspired him—guarded him, ennobled him also, in a strangely youthful, unworld-touched way. Yet he knew that it would grow harder for him to maintain the false position that he had assumed; that ever-reaching, invisible hand that he seemed to feel even in his slightest thoughts— How often he had held it and caressed it in his dreaming!—the tumult of his heart when near her, that unvoiced cry that suffered so in its stifling—what would be the end of it? In his great love for her he was grateful that in his deception he had raised that barrier even higher against himself. But the deception rankled none the less. That fictitious entanglement revolted him; the other woman who had never lived! the child, that the one woman had so longed to see, that

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had never been born! Could he look in the eyes that haunted him and lie again? Could the gray eyes look in his and not read the truth?

Yet for him, just now, there was nothing but a clearly defined task; he could not step aside. He must keep his purpose straight. As he walked up and down the platform of the straggling station and thought of all these strangely mingled thoughts, he tried to bring himself down to the problem: How best to find Frank Bellwood, and how to treat the future so far as he was concerned. His contempt was tinged with anger and disgust; but to abandon him now would be like leaving a man blindfolded on the brink of a precipice. Find him he must—save him if he could. He halted in the sentry-go he had made of the platform and looked at his watch—nearly three hours to wait!

There was a sawmill screeching and snarling at the end of a big lumber yard across the way, a panting switch engine drilling flat cars up and down the labyrinth of tracks. Lawrence stood and watched the scene. He almost envied the grimy-faced engineer whom he had just seen receive a dinner pail from a slip of a girl in a gingham dress, he almost envied the smart young station master who lived with his wife and babies in the second story of the station. How simple life was to some people; how little they appreciated their happiness!

Suddenly there was a commotion down the platform. The telegraph operator, followed by the baggageman and a waiting-room lounge, ran out and called to the station agent who was talking with a lumber checker at the freight house on the opposite side. What he said Lawrence could not hear; but the agent

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made a jump over the tracks and the checker, calling to two or three freight handlers, followed him, joining the excited group at the station door.

Lawrence walked toward them. The agent was listening to the operator with staring, frightened eyes; the rest, with dropped jaws and pale faces, stood about him.

“What is the matter?”

“Matter? My God, sir! number thirty-four—that’s the express—jumped the track and piled up at the bridge, just below Beaver Junction! She was delayed at the junction over forty minutes—something wrong with the engine—and started to make up time— They say it’s an awful wreck, sir. It’s burning now!”

The horror, the unreality, of the situation seemed to strike all dumb. One of the freight handlers broke the silence with a slow mutter of incoherent profanity.

“When did it happen?” Lawrence was surprised at the sound of his own voice.

“About fifteen minutes ago, I guess,” put in the operator. “They can’t get much help at the junction. There is nothin’ but the station and two or three houses. They’re telegraphin’ all along the line for help. My God! it’ll take two hours to get a wrecking train made up at Buskirk, but the Fulton local will soon come along. She’s due here in about three minutes.”

“How far is the wreck from here?”

The station master answered this time. “It’s twenty miles to the junction and about a mile to the bridge. Ain’t it, Jim?”

“About a mile,” answered the baggageman hoarsely.

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"Are there any doctors here?" Lawrence looked at the little main street with its two or three stores and forty or fifty dwellings ranging out toward the scrub pines and the lake.

"One, sir, lives with the druggist over yonder. Guess he's the only one."

"Go fetch him, and get the druggist, too. . . . Tell him what has happened. Get all the bandages and clean linen you can! . . . Here, Mr. Station Master, send one of these men to the sawmill. Call for volunteers with axes. We'll go down on the local when she comes."

"The west-bound through train will be due on the other line at the junction just about when we'll get there," said the station master. "I'll wire them to hold her and give us right of way." He ran into the waiting room.

Lawrence hardly heard him. In his mind there was growing, into hideous shape, a thought that had only flitted across it heretofore: *Frank Bellwood was on that train!* Supposing that—! He fought the insidious suggestion, and the whispering tempting devil of the moment left him. Soon there sounded the whistle of the approaching local; it roused him to a sense of the present.

It was a fearful sight! On the bank was a white-faced, helpless crowd; some were bending over figures on the ground. Every car had left the rails! Long masses of ironwork and overturned trucks were piled high in hideous shapes. Driven back by the heat, the train crew and the volunteer rescuers could only work about the edges. A heavy Pullman sleeper had crawled



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over the baggage car. The flames were licking its brightly painted sides, the black smoke sifting away into the woods. The engine, its wheels in the air, lay in the deep borrow pit, like a huge tumblebug on its back. The steam was yet roaring from the boiler, and the fuel in the tender that covered the cab was glowing fiercely. A few minutes before there had been groans and cries from the twisted and broken mass, but now they had almost ceased, except from one place, where a colored porter, his clothes singed and smoking, stood wielding an ax. Some men, toiling up the bank from the stream, were throwing water on him from their hats.

"There's a man in there!" some one shouted hoarsely in Lawrence's ear.

But there is no use of going farther! The papers the next morning told the story—a story that only swelled the list of all the others soon to be forgotten. There were the descriptions of survivors and eyewitnesses; there was the list of casualties, the dead and maimed, the missing and unidentified. Before the wrecking train arrived, after the wounded had been taken away and the charred remains examined, a man with white face and staring eyes made his way on foot up the track to the junction. Another west-bound train pulled in as he reached the station. The passengers descended and listened with horror to the story told by the junction people; but in a few minutes the engineer clambered back to his cab and the train started on its way. The man with the staring eyes swung himself on to the last car and huddled down into a seat.

He had not found Frank Bellwood!—unless—unless!—he shuddered at the recollection of the awful

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sight—he was among them. He had searched carefully there, too—a frightful, sickening search, as one might probe amid the warm embers of a *ghat*. No clew! and yet from his questions among the passengers, and his oft-repeated description, Bellwood *had been on the second car!* In the reaction that followed the strenuous work of the last two hours Lawrence's senses were benumbed. He could not bring himself to think of what it all might mean. There had been no use of telegraphing, or sending word. Before long he would be telling her, and then—and then! He closed his eyes and clinched his hands. What was before him? A thousand thoughts, as the numbness of his mind wore off, thronged and crowded his brain. He would get away, away from it all—it was over! He saw himself in England again, he pictured the little place on the wild Cornish coast—he still owned it, it had never been rented—and he was walking there, but not alone. It was *she*—she was with him! Now he could feel for the reaching hand and have the right to take it in his own! The path of fate led by strange turnings to goals that could not have been foreseen. And then, the picture changed. Poor Frank Bellwood! harassed and weakened by the last pitiful surrender, fighting in that stifling, crushing holocaust—the awful end! And yet through it—and again he almost groaned in the conflict that rose within him—shone the hope star of his happiness! Leaning his head forward on the back of the empty seat before him, he drew his breath in long, convulsive sobs.

The news of the wreck arrived at Brimfield as the local evening paper had just gone to press, but before

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long the casual rumor of it had reached the ears of a few, coming through Antioch. It had created little stir, however; such things happened almost daily, and it was miles away, on another road, a fact that made the occurrence have little moment for the town.

Judge Hollins leaving his office late that evening had not heard of it. He walked across the square, lit by the sputtering incandescent light, just as the trolley, with a few passengers on board, came in on the line from Antioch. A figure passed him at the corner. The judge had just stepped into the shadow of one of the elm trunks as it went by. He turned an instant and watched it. Under the sort of brakeman's cap he caught a glimpse of the face a little down between the shoulders. Whether it was from the thoughts that were in his mind, or because of the dimness of the light, he could not make out the reason, but what he had seen of the face had somehow reminded him of Bellwood. But, no, the walk was entirely different! He cast the idea aside and crossed the street to the hotel.

Mr. Slocum met him at the door.

"Been a big wreck over on the main trunk line," he volunteered. "Montreal and Albany Express. . . . Nineteen killed and thirty wounded."

Ellery gave out the figures as if they were a score from a ball game, triumphant in the fact that he was detailing news.

"Too bad! too bad!" said the judge, without turning his head. "Life is uncertain; 'stay at home' is good policy."

He passed on his way and climbed the stairs. The judge had lived at the old hotel in the days of Ellery's father. He was as much at home, and as much of a

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fixture there as the old, polished wooden chairs. Many a law case had been discussed and planned on the wide veranda. He had brought some legal papers to his room with him, but after reading them over absent-mindedly and sleepily, he tossed them aside, yawned, and went to bed.

About midnight he was awakened by a sudden, imperative knocking; going to the door, after hurriedly turning up the light, he opened it.

"My stars!" he exclaimed, "Lawrence, boy! what ails you? Come in! Come in! . . . Why, look at you! Where have you been?" He pushed him into the rocking chair. "Quick! tell me!" he ran on. "You're not ill? . . . Where's Frank?"

Lawrence raised his head. "Frank Bellwood," he said, steadying his voice with difficulty, "he's killed—killed in that wreck this afternoon. . . . I've just come from there."

"Lord! Lord!" exclaimed the judge, with a little sound of horror and commiseration made by tongue and teeth. "Lord! Lord!" he repeated. "Poor Amy! poor girl! poor girl!"

"I must tell her. . . . She does not know."

"I'll go over with you," said the judge. "Tell me about it while I put on my clothes."

Before he had finished dressing there was another knock on the door. It was the night porter. He seemed astonished at finding the judge up, and at his having some one with him.

"A little boy's downstairs, judge," said he, "who wants you to come over to Mrs. Bellwood's on Deane Street, soon's you can."

"My God! She's heard, then!" exclaimed the

## *THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE*

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judge, lifting himself into his coat. He turned to the porter who had just given Lawrence a nod of belated recognition.

"We'll be over, right away."

Then he hesitated, half closed the door, and spoke in a low, awed whisper: "You know the very strangest thing—this evening—" For some reason he stopped short, said nothing more, and put out the light.

When they had reached the street the messenger had gone. The judge took Lawrence's arm.

"It must have been horrible, horrible!" he said. And then, as if to close the dreadful picture out by a sudden change of thought, he asked a question that had been in his mind ever since Lawrence had begun the story.

"What was he doing on that train—if he was coming home?"

"He wasn't coming home, that is—not directly—at least, that is my idea."

"Perhaps he thought the train stopped at the junction, where he could make connections for Antioch."

"Perhaps."

Again the judge changed the subject.

"But how could Amy have heard the news?" He halted. "Good Lord! perhaps she doesn't know at all—! But she wouldn't be sending for me at this hour, unless it was something of great importance. Poor child! she's gone through so many troubles."

Lawrence did not reply. Despite himself his thoughts had flown on ahead. He was glad the judge was with him, and yet he hoped that he might see her alone. Never before did he feel the desire so strong within him to take that hand in his.

## *IN THE PATH OF FATE*

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True friends are those who understand our silence. The judge had pressed his arm closely and they walked on through the darkness.

"Here we are, at last! Perhaps I had better go in first and let her know that you've come. You'll wait. Eh, Larry?"

They had gone through the gate that was open and were standing at the steps. The lights were lit within the house and the shadow of a figure crossed the window of a room in the second story.

"I'll wait." His voice sounded dry and harsh.

The judge knocked. The door was opened immediately as if some one was expected. It was the maid-servant. Her attitude showed perturbation. Her voice was shaking and frightened.

"Come in, sir," she said. "Mrs. Bellwood wants to see you. Come right upstairs."

Lawrence followed into the hall. The judge whispered something to him that he did not hear, and then, preceded by the maid, the old gentleman climbed the creaky stairs.

An overpoweringly strange feeling came over Lawrence as he stood there. He was weak and dizzy; his knees began to waver. He grasped the newel post for support. It had not occurred to him that he had not touched any food since the evening before. He had never fainted in his life, but for an instant he feared it and calling upon his will with all his might he drew himself erect.

The stairs creaked again. He looked up. Judge Hollins was coming down, one hand on the banister as if to soften his footsteps.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE NEW WOOF ON THE LOOM

**S**TEADY, now steady," said the judge. He had taken him by both elbows and was standing in front of him in the little study. "Steady," he repeated; "is anything the matter with you, Larry?"

"No fear, sir; I am all right—just a bit shaky for a moment."

The reply was with an effort. When he had come in from the hallway he could not remember. "I'm all right," he went on. "Is she coming down? Does she know?"

The judge's grasp tightened.

"There has been a mistake," he panted. "Listen—he's alive! He was not killed! He's up there now!"

The room swam. Something flashed and tingled in Lawrence's brain. He got an echo of the judge's following words as if they came from a far distance.

"He's very ill. He's been through something awful—some terrible ordeal in his escape. She wants you to come up to him. She's waiting there at the head of the stairs. Do you need my arm?"

"No—thank you; no, sir."

He was in the hall again. The stairway seemed to rock and sway before him. He was ascending it slowly. He found some difficulty in lifting his eyes. But she

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was there on the landing. An instant later and he had taken the outstretched hand. He paused—faltered—another step—and her other hand was on his shoulder. It was all he could do to prevent that heavy head from falling forward on her bosom. But again his will came to the fore; he leaned to one side against the wall, then straightened slowly.

“Larry! Larry!” exclaimed Amy, half supporting him.

Her voice trembled in his ear, her figure quivered against him. It was only for an instant, but their souls seemed to sway together. He broke the spell of the breathless, laden silence.

“How is he?” he asked.

She did not remove her arm from his, never resenting that he had drawn her closer.

“He’s very ill, delirious. . . . But you, too—you have suffered. You are not injured? . . . Oh, I have been so afraid! so fearful! Were you with him?” Her eyes sought his face, and for an instant he could not make reply, but his strength was returning.

The judge, standing a step or two below them, remained silent drawing deep breaths.

“No, no—there is nothing wrong with me. . . . Come! Let us go to him.” Lawrence found voice at last. “He has had a terrible experience—there was an accident—I was not with him. . . . I’m all right now.”

He stepped past her and turned at the door of the bedroom. No sooner had he entered than he smelled the pungent odor of stale smoke that will cling to clothing after a conflagration. A Norfolk jacket the minister had been wearing and the rest of his clothes were flung upon a chair, and on the bed, swaying his



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head to and fro, his face flushed, muttering incoherent words, lay Bellwood. Lawrence bent over him, placed one hand on the hot head, from which a wet towel had just fallen, and turning gave some directions.

"It is the reflex of the shock," he said. "Has anyone seen him?"

"I came home only an hour or so ago," Amy replied. "I had been at my mother's—she had sent for me at two o'clock—and when I returned I found him here—like this. I sent Jack for Dr. Rublee and then to the other doctor. Both were out, although they expected Dr. Rublee back soon; Porter they thought had gone to Antioch. And then I sent for Judge Hollins. He had been in some dreadful accident, that I knew, but I could not make out much from what he said. Oh! I feared, perhaps, that you—" She paused and touched Lawrence's arm again and let her fingers rest there a moment. "I could not tell what might have happened——"

"It was a wreck on the railway. He was in it; I will tell you all later."

He turned and drew back the shade. A dim light filtered through the evergreens from a window of the neighboring house but a few feet away. He spoke softly to the judge, still standing in the hall at the bedroom entrance.

"They have a telephone here next door at the Browsers'; some one is still awake. Ring up my number, won't you, please? They'll answer. Have my man bring down the large case from my office desk."

He gave some more directions quickly, but calmly, and turned once more to the moaning, muttering figure. Bending down he began an examination. There

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were no bones broken; but the minister was bruised and badly shaken. There was a great contusion on the left side of the head. But the fever meant more than these, and the heart was fluttering and uneven. Lawrence looked grave as he rose and straightened out the coverlet.

How quickly he had sunk all feelings other than those of his profession! And yet it afforded him a merciful relief from his own complex sensations.

“Is it his brain?”

It was Amy speaking. She stood at the head of the bed, apparently calm, suggesting in her word and bearing the strangely reliant attitude that is the gift of women called upon to face the great emergencies.

“Yes, I fear some brain trouble, and he has a fever; but it may pass off. You were doing the right thing.”

He noticed the cracked ice in the bowl.

“I did not know but what it might have been——”

He understood her before she had finished the sentence.

“No; not that. Maybe the lack of it has augmented the trouble; he was in a bad condition to withstand a strain. But there is nothing immediate to be feared—I am convinced.”

The professional tone was unconscious. He watched her as she placed the cool bandage on the sufferer's head. She had done it as deftly as a hospital nurse might perform a perfunctory duty.

“There is nothing more for us to do?”

“Nothing more, until my medicine case, or one of the other doctors, comes.”

They stood there silently facing one another, as if neither knew just what to say. Then, at last, she

In a low voice he began to tell her what had happened, but he left out much, and when it came to the search, when he could find no trace of the child, he said, "I could not help but fear—" he stopped, and then he said, "I could not help but fear—and I thought of that at once."

He was unprepared for the surprise before he knew it. Amy had bent her head on his hand. He felt her hot breath on her lips. He lifted her gently, and pressed her head until her soft hair was pressed against his cheek. His tongue seemed to be crying out over her. Wild whispered words of encouragement were clamoring in his own voice in his ears. "I could not help but fear—spoken? Never could he tell!

There was a gasp and sudden commotion coming from the pillows; neither had he spoken when it began again. There sound of knocking on the door downstairs.

"You have been so good. I—"

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The stairway was creaking again. A strange voice was talking to the maidservant almost outside the door, and at this moment the sound of wheels and horse's hoofs came from the roadway. They stopped quickly and the gate clicked.

The first comer was Dr. Rublee. The second was the man from Lawrence's house, and with him was the judge, who stated as an excuse for his not returning that he had walked there in order to see that the message had been properly understood.

The doctor had entered the room with a nod of professional salutation and a whispered greeting to Mrs. Bellwood; he seemed somewhat surprised and disappointed at finding Kellogg there, and forthwith began a short explanation of his delay. He was a fat, puffy man, with a thinly straggled and unkempt gray beard, but a finely shaped head like an antique bust. His breath was heavy with the dead fumes of brandy. Lawrence drew him out into the hall; they talked there, softly, out of earshot of the others.

In an hour Dr. Rublee had left and the judge had returned to the hotel. But Lawrence still stayed on, sitting alone in the sick-room. The maidservant had brought him some food and, after eating, his dizziness had left him. His mind was clear, he could reason calmly; but he could arrive at no decision. With him was the lingering touch of that slender hand; the secret the gray eyes had confided. He endeavored to keep his thoughts away from the thrilling truth he had been so long in discerning. How blind he had been! It changed everything, filling the future with unforeseen perplexities, new dangers and doubts, fresh trials. He tried, as if to gain relief from the dear

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torment of his discovery, to dwell on other things. He forced himself at last to go over the events of the day, the crowded moments, the swiftly changing scenes! He kept wondering how it was that Frank had escaped from the wreck without having been seen by the others. The hour that he had arrived at home was a mystery; he had let himself into the house, and the first sign of his presence was when the frightened servant had discovered him moaning in his weakness and delirium. She had gone immediately to find Amy. But the latter had arrived at the rectory during her absence and, afraid to leave, she had roused little Jack out of bed to send him to the doctors' homes again and to the hotel. All this Lawrence had learned; but how Bellwood had reached Brimfield so long before him he could not imagine. Then all at once there occurred to him the earlier train that they had just missed meeting at the junction. Bellwood might have come on that; there was no other way to account for it! He tried to think of the man on the bed as an abstract personality—a human theorem, something to be worked out, considered, apart from his own existence. That was the only way.

The patient was resting more quietly, the fever had somewhat abated, but his face and limbs contracted every now and then nervously, and his breath faltered. Despite the fact that the clothing had been removed, the odor of smoke still clung to the room.

Not a word had Lawrence and Amy had together since Dr. Rublee had departed. She had appeared so pale and tired that he, together with the judge and Lawrence, had insisted on her going to her own room and resting. Strange to say, she had seemed noth-

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ng loath and had made a pretense, at least, of obeying.

But there was no rest for her that night. She lay fully dressed on her bed with wide-open eyes looking into the darkness, never moving. She was not struggling against her thoughts, she had abandoned herself to them, in a complete, unqualified succumbing.

Nothing that had happened could change her sense of duty, nothing would alter her manner of living; she would face life on the morrow exactly as it came to her, living for the day, as it became her. But she had gone through more than the trials that the night suggested; the last ten hours had been hours of bitter heart conflict. The tottering castle of her faith—the small faith that had been left to her, and that she so wanted to preserve, had fallen—and she could look calmly at the ruins. Her eyes were opened, unappalled, unfrightened, filled with dumb suffering. She had spent the afternoon and evening with her mother at Meadow Farm. Mrs. Winter had had a very bad turn in the morning and had hardly slept the night before; but Amy had not told Lawrence of this, nor of how she had sat with and quieted her mother all that afternoon. They had talked long. No one would ever know what passed between them! But when her aunt, the tired, thin-faced little woman, had come back from her duties at the Atheneum, she had found Mrs. Winter resting more peacefully and quietly than she had at some time past.

As she lay there Amy would have given a great deal if she could have found relief in weeping. But the tears would not come. Never, or at least very seldom, had she wept alone about herself. The quick sympa-

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thy that she felt for others had often dimmed her eyes, but self-pity was a luxury she would not allow. She had deliberately chosen her road, and of her own will had followed it. Although she had gone on from a false start, she would follow it still and, as long as her strength held out, she would not groan at her burden or complain of the steepness of the path. But she saw things so clearly now! Many abstruse passages were translated until she understood the meaning, the import, of much she had passed over in her perplexity. The past seemed to lapse into the present with perfect reason for things as they existed; no effort of hers could change them. There was no use in looking back! She tried to face the future, but the plan of it all was indistinct; she could not penetrate the blinding mists. "It must be from day to day," she thought, "from hour to hour."

There was no feeling of disloyalty in the self-acknowledgment of her love; she would, long before this, have owned to it purely in her prayers, with never a thought of sin. But now, mingled with this great love, was a gratitude founded on her sense of justice, her love for truth. It had been all for *her*—always all for her! Whether what she had found out that day could be kept a secret from him—from either—she did not know. She made no vows; she trusted in him, believed in his strength. It was not necessary to count on her own, although, as yet, she did not fear its test at all.

So far as her husband was concerned, except for the fact that he needed her care and nursing, his position had hardly changed. The haunting fears and doubts that she had so hated to harbor and had fought

## ***THE NEW WOOF ON THE LOOM***

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ainst had become just dead, unthreatening embers, ver to be disturbed, impossible to be fanned into a me. She knew everything: his base disloyalty, his ception, his weakness! But then she knew his suffer- g; she pitied him without a shred of hatred, without twinge of revengeful feeling. In her great brav- y she almost forgave him, as she had already for- ven her mother, but without telling her of the hope- vastating extent of the conspiracy.

All at once her mind turned to Lawrence, sitting me there in the sick-room. She would go to him! was not fair that after all he had gone through he ould still be called upon to give out more! As this ought came to her, her arms extended into the dark- ss; her heart forced up unspoken words from the pths of unsounded passions. With a sense of sud- n danger that frightened her with its deliciousness, nearness, its freedom from all shame, she turned d buried her face in the pillows. A long sob, part thankfulness for the warning, part a bitterly sweet rrender to her own self-knowledge, shook her from ad to foot.

The door opened softly; she looked up startled. ere stood the children in their white nightgowns, nd in hand. Without a cry or a sound they ran to r, and she gathered them close in the soft embrace a great gratitude and mighty love. Here would e always find her refuge! Here were her guardians; re the safe guides along the hard road and through e mists!

She comforted them with caresses and low-spoken tences, lip to cheek, and after a few minutes led em to their nursery and tucked them once more in



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their cots. She sat down between them as she had done so often, waiting until they were asleep. At last after bending low over each little figure to make sure, she went back to the sick-room.

Her husband was resting quietly; Lawrence had fallen into a tired, motionless slumber on the sofa. She stood there a moment, looking from one to the other. Then, moving softly over to the armchair by the bed, she sank slowly into it, stilling her breath for fear of awakening them.

One thing bore upon her with a growing certainty: everything was known to all three in that hushed room. Their mutual relations, with a few differences, were absolutely understood!

Suddenly she gave a start. Her husband was awake. He had raised himself on his elbow, and his trembling finger was pointed at the man he hated; pushing back the covers he strove to reach the floor.

"Tell him to go!" his voice shrilled loudly. "Tell him to go. He'd like to see me dead!"

Lawrence jumped to his feet and reached him quickly, bending over him, paying no attention to his words. But Bellwood would not be quieted; he raved on incoherently. . . .

At last she had stilled him! As Lawrence pressed back the fluid from the merciful needle into his arm his voice faded slowly and he sank once more into unconsciousness.

They both were panting as if the scene and the struggle they had just passed through had taxed them beyond the limit of their strength. Still they did not sit down, they stood there facing each other without stirring from the bedside.



## ***THE NEW WOOF ON THE LOOM***

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“He will rest now?”

“Yes.” He stepped toward her.

“O Larry! will you help me?” She leaned back against the wall.

“What is it?” He strove to take her hand; he would have drawn her close.

“Leave me—you must go now.”

“But, Amy——”

“Please go—wait till I send for you—wait till you hear from me. Please go.”

## CHAPTER X

### THE DECISION

**L**AURENCE had been away almost a fortnight. He had written from New York that he expected to return to Brimfield on the express that arrived Saturday afternoon, and Judge Hollins, who early in the day had received a telegram from him, met him by appointment at the station. It had been arranged that they were to dine together at the big house back of the wide lawn and the evergreens.

“My stars! but I’m glad to see you, Larry,” cried the old gentleman, grasping his hand as he descended to the platform. “You could not have returned more opportunely. I needed you. . . . You got my reply to your wire? Of course, you must have.”

“Yes, it was handed me on the train at Rochester. We’ll have a long evening together, judge.”

They climbed into the two-seated buckboard and drove down the quiet village street. The judge’s silence now appeared rather strange after the enthusiasm of his greeting; but his companion did not seek to interrupt it; his face, usually full of healthy color, seemed drawn and pale. Soon they reached the big white house and drew up at the portico. Lawrence Kellogg looked about him with a sigh.

The declining day was full of October, but warm

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and sunny. There was a haze in the air and a pleasantly pungent odor of burning leaves. The front doors were ajar and the wide hall, with the book-crowded library opening from it, looked hospitably inviting. It suggested peace and comfort, freedom from care and worry. In fact, the fine old house inside and out smiled invitation; it seemed to say: "Live here, take thy ease and rest." Yes, that was what he had come there for—"rest"—and now! It seemed cruel to think of closing it all up again, letting the dust and dead flies litter the old mahogany furniture, and the birds nest behind the closed shutters, and the grass grow tall on the lawn. But he had reached a decision; he had done what seemed to him wisest. He was going.

"You ran away rather unexpectedly, Larry," remarked the judge, as they stood in the doorway. "But as I said, I'm mighty glad you came back just now. You won't be starting off again soon, will you?"

"That depends," rejoined Lawrence; "I mean we'll go over the question later. I won't run away without any warning, if you mean that."

"And you left no address; you know that won't do. I didn't know where to get hold of you."

"It was an oversight; forgive me. I tried to find you, but you were away. . . . Come into the library and we'll talk."

The light was dim in the recesses of the big room, but the glow from the sunset came through the small-paned windows and lit up the gold lettering on the handsome books in the tall cases and softened the features of the portrait of Amandus Kellogg, who, in an impossible stock, and inhumanly sloping shoulders, gazed out of the narrow gilt framing. The set of the

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strong jaw reminded the judge of Larry, somehow. He had never noticed it before.

"Now, fire your guns. You speak first, judge."

The old gentleman settled down in an armchair and took out a big notebook. "It's generally the custom, in consultation, for the youngest—to have that privilege, isn't it?"

"Yes, sometimes; but we'll waive it." Lawrence seated himself on the window sill. "Now, please——"

"All right, then." The judge looked over his glasses. "There has come up out of a clear sky, Lawrence, the most unsuspected situation here; a situation that I don't exactly know how to handle—that is, how to meet. Catch the point? A—er—man came here from New York this afternoon and, after making some inquiries at the hotel, where he, of course, ran afoul of Ellery and got the history of the county back to the Indian wars, he asked where Mrs. Winter lived."

"Yes?"

Lawrence moved quickly from the window and drew up another big chair fronting the judge, who continued:

"His name was Louis A. Gunsberg, and when I met him I found he'd been out to Meadow Farm, and although, of course, he couldn't see Mrs. Winter—the old lady is pretty low—he saw Mrs. Blatchford, and she, of course, referred him to Amy and to me."

"Well; go on, sir."

"You remember my telling you that Colonel Winter left a lot of stock in a Mexican mine named the 'El Cintura,' and that I thought it was worthless eh?" The judge paused to make sure his hearer too in the full import of this. "You remember?"

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“Certainly.” Lawrence looked at him curiously.

“Well, sir, it turns out I was mistaken! Larry, my boy”—the old lawyer had paused and was speaking with slow deliberation—“this fellow, Gunsberg, has made me such an offer for that stock that it makes me feel funny all down my spine to think of it! He beat about the bush at first and then came out with a bid of—what d’ye think?”

“I don’t think at all; what?” Again his eye sought the judge’s; a strange smile was on his lips, but he was not aware of it.

“One hundred thousand dollars!” Judge Holins leaned back in the big chair gasping; he repeated the sum to himself beneath his breath.

“What did you do? Did you talk it over with anybody?” His lack of astonishment the judge passed over in his eagerness to proceed.

“With Amy—yes. She was all for accepting it at once, and then I told her I thought I’d better wait till I’d seen you, and that gave her an idea, apparently, and she said—er—something that I took to mean to ‘do nothing’ till *she’d* seen you, too. I can tell you, son, never did anything happen that means so much to so many of the salt of the earth—I mean the two old ladies and Amy and the children; not him—the text-quoting skunk! If Bellwood should lose his position—he gets a good salary—he’d never get another. I know what’s the matter. It’s all bound to come out. They haven’t saved a dollar. The mortgage on the farm would be foreclosed, Mrs. Winter and Mrs. Blatchford would go to the poorhouse, and Amy and the boy and girl—good Lord! what would become of ’em!”

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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“She wished to see me—did she? I mean did she say so?”

“Well—er—yes, Larry; you’ve—er—got to see her. I don’t know what’s happened altogether, of course; but she told me some things that clear up much that puzzled me. I know what’s been the matter with Frank—what’s the matter with him now.”

“There’s a good deal I intend to tell you, too, old friend; but let’s get back to the mining stock. You’re the trustee of the property, aren’t you?”

“Yes, and I’ll tell you now what I did”—the judge was panting in excitement—“I told him that if he’d make an offer of one hundred and twenty-five thousand we’d *talk* about it. You see, he said that he had to know to-night. There was no way of my finding out anything about the value of it; may be worth more, for all that I know. I believed it best to be cautious.”

Lawrence raised his eyebrows slightly. “You did right in getting all you could, of course; how does the matter stand?”

“He’s to let me know before eight o’clock; he’s going to leave at midnight—must accept or refuse my offer before he goes. I don’t know much about these sorter things; my tendency is to hold over and investigate. You know I have a right, under the terms of the will, to dispose of this property without consulting anybody, but Amy, too, she says—er—just as much as says—‘wait’ till she sees you.”

“I don’t think that is necessary,” replied Lawrence hastily. “You see there has been a newly awakened interest in these Mexican mines; but it is mostly speculative. My advice to you and to her is to get as much

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as you can, of course, but close up the deal as quickly as possible. I'd do it to-night, if I were you."

"I'd better be going back, then."

"No; stay to supper, judge; there will be plenty of time after; it will be ready in a minute." And then slowly as if to collect his friend's wits for him: "Whom did you say this Gunsberg represented?"

The judge walked to the window and drew out the notebook; he could just read the name in the failing light: "Kahn, Davis & Co., Broad Street; ever heard of 'em?"

"Oh, yes; good firm; they've been my— Hullo, here's Mary to tell us supper is ready!"

Arm in arm Lawrence and his old friend walked into the dining room. At the door Judge Hollins paused.

"Do you know—I think we take this good news in a mighty unenthusiastic way, Larry—don't we?"

Lawrence smiled: "I tell you what we'll do, then, to make up," he proposed; "we'll open a bottle of that Lone Star Madeira my father prized so and drink a health to Mr. Gunsberg and the—what did you call it?"

"The 'El Cintura,'" replied the judge.

"Right," said Lawrence. "'El Cintura.'"

It was done in proper form but with rather a thankful gravity on the part of Lawrence and a forced exuberance on the judge's. One might have thought that neither appreciated the full meaning of the situation embodied in the lifting of their glasses. The fact was that it seemed to oppress them with its weight of suggested promise.

"You know, Larry," half meditated the old lawyer,



## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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speaking very slowly, "that this news has so dwelt upon me that it has discounted other things that I wanted to tell you, and has rather put out of my mind some questions that I wished to ask. I have been a man of one idea for the last few hours; but now, if you will forgive me, my boy, I am going to be very frank, and if I ask anything that you don't care to answer just put in an objection and it will be sustained."

"Go ahead, judge! Mind you, nothing you might ask me can offend."

"You're going to leave Brimfield, are you? I believe I can read your mind."

"Yes, I expect to be in London in about three weeks."

"London! You won't come back here, boy?"

Lawrence looked at the judge and slowly shook his head. "I don't think so, sir. It has been a great failure. I can see no reason for returning."

His friend did not pursue the line of reasoning suggested by the interpolation. Instead he returned the gaze for a moment, then lowered his eyes. A look of sadness came over his handsome old face.

"Things often go wrong in the world," he said slowly. "There is no use of railing at fate, of course—no sense in repining. It is often better to swim with the current than to fight for a far shore." He paused, slightly hesitating, then resumed, smiling kindly: "But the tide turns, my boy, and if we keep afloat and save our strength, we may reach it after all."

The understanding sympathy was so plain that no comment was required. Lawrence sat in silence, and the judge poured himself out another glass of Lone

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Star. He sipped it slowly, and then, putting down the glass, leaned an elbow on the table.

"I want you to tell me," said he, "the actual state and condition of Franklin Bellwood's health; that is, if there is no objection."

"None in the least, judge. . . . I'm not attending him any more, you know. Dr. Smith, from Antioch, has taken hold with old Rublee here. But there's nothing much to be done. He won't submit to restraint or treatment; and the law can't touch him. He has heart trouble, but it is one of those remarkable cases about which nothing definite can be predicted. As to the other matter; he will probably live longer if he continues the use of morphine or opiates under proper direction, than if he stopped them. He may go on this way for years. Of course, there may come a breakdown of the faculties preceded by slow retrogression, or it may come suddenly. In either case, of course, it would mean putting him away in some place where he can be taken care of. That *you* will have to look out for. Amy understands. It is needless for me to tell you that he and I no longer occupy the positions that we once did—the relations, I should say. My hand must not be felt by him in the attempted control or suggested management of any of his affairs. That is all."

"He's up and about now, Larry—going strong, it appears, the contemptible canting sneak! Just think of the fine men in the ministry who haven't a tenth of his talents! How a——"

"Yes; Smith says that the case is one that is most unusual; he never met with one like it, nor did I."

"I heard a strange bit of gossip to-day," began

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

the judge, smiling slightly; "but, considering the source, I don't think it worth repeating; still——"

He paused. His hearer was evidently paying no attention; he had risen and had gone to the window, standing there with his back turned. The old gentleman seemed to catch his mood; he settled deeper into his chair, a frown of preoccupation took the place of his half-amused smile.

Then followed a long silence.

Lawrence was recalling the awful scene that night at the rectory, when Franklin Bellwood had been on the verge of an accusation, so terrible that even in his half-delirious fury he had left it unpronounced. And how bravely she had spoken when she had stilled his words! It was as if her personality, the aroma of her character, filled the air like some peace-bringing spirit breath. Her husband had looked at her and hushed, his wide, dilated pupils searching her face. There was no suggestion of the understanding of any accusation that concerned her conduct. In the tremendously dramatic situation she had been as calm and sure as if she was only trying to comfort a sick person disturbed by the illusions—the *agri somnia* of a dream. And that strange parting, when she had besought his help—so pathetic in her weakness—her words still lingered: "Wait till I send for you—wait till you hear from me."

And so he had left them together! But Franklin Bellwood's words had wounded him like a knife thrust.

"Tell him to go—tell him to go! He knows he'd like to see me dead! Yes; those were his words: 'He'd like to see me dead!'"

"Heavens, Larry!" cried the judge, awakening

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from his reverie, "it's nearly eight! I must hasten back. Mr. Gunsberg will think it strange. . . . Good Lord, if I should lose this chance I'd blow out my poor old apology for brains! Just think; that money, properly invested, would give Amy and the children enough to live on for the rest of their lives, in more than comfort—no matter what might happen. . . . I have an idea! Suppose you come down with me to the hotel and meet him; will you?"

"I don't think I'd better appear in the matter, had I? I couldn't offer you any advice, but of course I'd like to know the results. . . . I tell you what: come into the study and use the telephone. That's not half a bad idea—and then I'll know, you see, just what terms you arrive at."

As Lawrence was speaking he had turned; taking the judge by the arm he half led him from the dining room.

It did not take long to get into communication with the hotel; Mr. Gunsberg appeared to be within calling, for he quickly responded. The judge, as usual, was gruff.

"This is Judge Hollins—yes—yes. I'm now at Dr. Lawrence Kellogg's. . . . What?—hold the wire." The speaker faltered, a look of consternation on his face; at the same time he closed the transmitter with his hand and placed the mouth of the receiver against his cheek. "He wants to know if I have spoken to you about the matter; he didn't ask me not to. . . . But, good Lord!"

"Better tell him that you have talked it over with me. It can't do any harm."

The judge nodded. "Yes," said he aggressively,

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into the instrument, "I've talked it over with the doctor; he's an old friend of all the parties concerned—I beg your pardon, you exacted no secrecy in the affair, Mr. Gunsberg. . . . All right—I'll take *one hundred and fifty thousand dollars* for that stock—not a cent less!"

The judge made a gesture with his foot in Lawrence's direction, accompanied by a glance of the eye. His face was flushed with excitement. All at once his jaw dropped and he swung about.

"Good Lord!" he whispered loudly. "He wants to know if you could overhear what I was saying!" This time the judge forgot to cover the transmitter.

"Better say that I'm here in the room. I don't see what harm it can do, either." Lawrence spoke clearly. "Let him know that we have advised together. I agree in anything you say."

Mr. Gunsberg was doing the talking now, the judge signifying that he was listening by grunts of assent.

"All right, I'll be there in twenty minutes."

He hung up the telephone. "Phew!" he exclaimed, patting his brow loudly with the palm of his hand. "I don't know what to make of it! . . . Good idea—my tacking on that other twenty-five thousand—eh?"

"Yes, I told you to get all you thought you could get."

"By the golden harp! Larry, I might have got a million for all that I know!"

Lawrence laughed oddly. "I hardly think that," he said quietly. "A million is a large sum of money. Will I call a trap for you?"

"No, I think I'll walk. It will do me good. Just think a hundred"—the judge shook his head with an

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excited chuckle and slapped Lawrence on the back—"and *fifty* thousand, my boy! Where in the devil is my hat? I am going to do the fastest bit of walking I have done in many a year. . . . Tiddly dum te dido! feel gay as a lark on the dew-spangled grass! Tum ti, tiddly dum"—he made a strangely youthful jig step.

As they reached the hallway he took down his soft black sombrero from the elk antlers that served for a rack, and quieted himself. Then the smile of amusement once more crossed his face.

"By the way, Larry," he said, "I think I *will* tell you that bit of gossip I heard: That old gas bag Ellery told me he'd seen Frank Bellwood with Mrs. Rice in her automobile to-day, and that he'd been out at Elmside. Hardly believe it, do you?"

Lawrence did not return the smile, merely dismissing the news and the question with a shrug of his shoulders that suggested a volume of comment on Ellery's character. He had opened the front door and was about to start the judge on his way, with a promise of a meeting on the morrow, when all at once there sounded from the road beyond the pines the sound of loud, carousing cries and the jabber of angry drunken voices in broken English.

"Those confounded strikers from the waterworks," said the judge, pausing on the veranda. "There's going to be trouble, they have been drinking now for days. They assaulted one of the contractors and nearly killed him Thursday; they're a menace to the neighborhood. I hear that they're going to import new laborers this week and drive this lot out of their filthy camp up there. If we only had decent county officers, most of this murdering, chicken-stealing gang would

## *THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE*

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be in the lockup! . . . Well, good night, Larry; come to my office in the morning. I'm going to try and persuade you to change some of your plans—but not now. I say, that's rather funny about Bellwood and Mrs. Ned, eh? I don't suppose you're going to church, are you?" He had changed the subject suddenly at Lawrence's shake of the head.

"No, not to-morrow. Good night, judge."

He followed his friend's retreating figure until it had disappeared in the gloom, behind the evergreens, and then, closing the door, he went back to the lonely library. Once more Mr. Gunsberg was called to the telephone for a few minutes' earnest conversation. The short talk concluded, Lawrence took out some papers. Before seating himself, however, or looking them over, he straightened up and folding his arms—his habit—remained there standing deep in thought. Franklin Bellwood and Mrs. Rice! Here was a strange mixing! Of course he knew, and Amy knew, of the widow's contribution to the church; it could not be otherwise. During the first week of Bellwood's illness Mrs. Ned had "kindly inquired" almost every day and once or twice sent flowers. But supposing this gossip was true? His wide experience taught him much as he reasoned it over. It might be another phase of the minister's retrogression—the sudden diversion in a new direction of a partly dethroned moral sense, meeting the whim of an unbridled nonmoral instinct. Both unbalanced from different causes leading to the same effect. And Amy! How would she meet this? The rankling, poisoned words that her husband had muttered that night of their parting sang in his ears over and over: "He'd like to see me dead!" Why had not

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the wreck on the road claimed him? Oh! the temptation of dwelling on that thought! He leaned forward on the desk, his eyes closed; his shoulders rose and fell with the force of his deep breathing. At last he calmed himself. The words of the note she had sent him that had begged for no answer drove out again the whispering devil. "We must not see each other, we must not even write—it must be never again. I see it all now. We must be brave. Always you will be in my thoughts, always in my prayers. God bless and keep you, Lawrence, knight of mine! The thought of you will keep me away from you—the thought of me, I trust, and know, will make you understand."

Oh! the sweetness and purity of the soul that gleamed through every word! the wonder of it! Who could doubt now that there existed on the earth the essence of the teaching of the Greatly Good? How small and unworthy he was in his groaning, tempted spirit; and yet how rich in the knowledge of such a purity of love! The ancient man in him would have possessed her, would hold her, clasp her close, fight—kill for her! And yet it was his soul that knew her, infolded her—and kept her safe.

The tempest was over! His eyes and throat pained and choked him, but he forced himself to concrete thought: Yes, he was doing everything he could—and yet as he had once lied to shield and save her; he was deceiving her now—because he saw no other way!

All at once what the judge had said came to him like a flash—she wished to see him! After all that had happened—she wished to see him! Could the old lawyer have been mistaken? Perhaps in his kindly way, and in his generous, chivalric interpretation of his



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knowledge of how things were between them, he had invented the suggested bidding. How odd it was he had not suspected anything in the purchase of the mining stock! Perhaps it was better that he had not. At all events, it was rather late in the day to tell him now.

But Amy! He must be sure before he made a move. The relief of feeling that, come what might, she would at least be placed beyond the grip of want and distress warmed him with a glow of comfort.

He sat long into the night writing and arranging his papers. It was only the lowering of the oil in the lamp that sent him to bed before daylight.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE BREAKING

**I**T was Sunday, but not bright and warm as the day before had been—a cold morning with the wind blowing and the sun slipping occasionally from behind fast-moving clouds.

Amy stood at the window of her room in the rectory, looking out at the leaves as they drifted from the branches of the elm trees. She had finished her breakfast and had sent the children off to Meadow Farm with a note to her aunt, Mrs. Blatchford. All at once she turned from the window and listened. She heard her husband steal down the stairs and make his way back to the dining room. She had not seen him to speak to since the morning before, when he started out for a walk. She had lunched and dined at her mother's, and part of the afternoon she had spent at Judge Hollins's office, going over the important news concerning the "El Cintura." At nine o'clock at night she had received a late visit from the old lawyer, who had told her that the bargain was concluded, and that as trustee he would deposit on the morrow in the bank at Antioch the check of Kahn, Davis & Co. for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, to be subsequently divided between her mother and herself, according to the terms of the will.

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The news, that seemed to her to be impossible at first, incapable of being understood, she had not yet communicated to Franklin Bellwood, for the reason that his whereabouts had been unknown to her during the day—a fact that had occasioned her no little anxiety. Upon his return, in her absence, he had gone to his room, and at the hour of the judge's call he was lying in a deep stupor, from which she deemed it best not to attempt to rouse him. For an hour, now, she had been waiting for him. All night she had lain awake thinking.

Her horizon had changed most wonderfully between the last sunrise and the one that greeted her this Sunday morning. She could see beyond the four walls of this room, beyond the rectory hedge and the hills that surrounded Brimfield—and these had been her boundary and her rounds for long, heavy-trudging years, during which, the day just gone was like the day to follow. Now all was to change! The country into which she looked was strange to her; it gleamed for a minute bright with promise and then clouded dark with threatening shadows—the roads and the valleys, clear for a certain length, ended in the ever-present mists. But as she had seen her duty under the dead weight of things as they were, she now saw it under the altered motive power given to her will and thoughts. It had taken a new direction, that was all. Lawrence Kellogg was in town; and he was going! She would never see him again, but he knew of the sudden change in her fortunes. That only gave her added reason for abiding by her decisions. The judge had given full rein to his imagination in describing Lawrence's joy at the tidings. Somehow the picture did not seem to fit into

## THE BREAKING

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Amy's mind as being clear or definite. She knew how he must share with her in the good news, but his capacities for rejoicing, she believed, were not of the sort to show outwardly in any such spectacular manner. But——

"Why! you should have seen and heard him!" the judge had exhilarated. "He would have thrown his cap into the air—if he'd had a cap and we hadn't been sitting in the library—right under the stern eye of old Amandus's portrait. I don't know how to describe it better than his giving silent cheers—that's it, 'silent cheers.' And what do you suppose! What? Nothing would do, Amy, but he must get out a bottle of the general's Lone Star Madeira—there can't be more than half a dozen left—and we must drink to old Gunsberg and 'El Cintura'! Yes, ma'am, and we clinked glasses; and I tell you we held a ratification meeting—gad! he was just like a boy! I thought he'd be chasing out here right away! You will see him, my dear, of course; he doesn't leave till Tuesday morning, maybe not till Wednesday. How foolish! Of course you will! You can wager he wants to see you! He'll be at my office to-morrow. I wish I could head off this idea of his of clearing out! Hang it all!—pardon me—that'll be about the time you'll be at church!"

"I'm not thinking of going to church, judge," Amy had replied quietly. "I'm going to be down at the homestead; Lawrence will be very busy making his preparations for departure, I feel sure. I may not get a chance to see him. Believe me he will quite understand our not meeting again—so will I." Even in her own ears her words sounded forced and hard and un-

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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bending; but at least, the explanation was intended to convey the truth.

“My stars!” exclaimed the judge. “If I was you—I mean if I was he—” He halted, not knowing how to finish. The fact was he had begun to think aloud, which is usually embarrassing, and had caught himself just in time. His confusion, that Amy seemed not to notice, had hastened him to his departure.

During the long night that had just ended, despite the mistiness of the future, Amy Bellwood had reached a number of definite conclusions. And these urged upon her the necessity for immediate action. There would be no parleying on her part with any temptation to put off matters or to refuse to accept the consequences. This Day of Rest would mean to her almost more than any other day in her life had meant; the self-chosen journey lay before her—if not into the land of her Desire, at least toward the country of New Hopes.

She descended the stair and walked slowly to the door of the dining room. Her husband gave a start as he looked up from toying with the food on his plate. He forced himself to a greeting.

“I made my own coffee,” he said. “I supposed that you were busy somewhere. I overslept myself.”

The maid servant was just leaving the room with a tray of dishes, swinging the door into the kitchen open with a push of her knee. Amy waited until she had disappeared.

“Frank,” she said evenly, “I must see you in the study as soon as you have finished. Don’t leave without seeing me.”

The minister frowned. “We’ll have very little time

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before service, and surely you are going," he said, chivying a bit of toast about the tablecloth with nervous fingers. "Couldn't we put it off? I feel well enough to conduct part of the service, at least. Bache will be there, of course, to relieve me if necessary."

A look of sudden weariness crossed Amy's face. "We won't discuss things here," she said. "I'll wait for you in the study. . . . Nothing that you have heard for a long time, Frank, is so important as what I have to say to you."

Bellwood glanced furtively over his shoulder toward the kitchen door. "Now, please," he began, "we never have had a scene but once. Don't you"—and then his courage forsook him and he leaned his head forward on both hands. "You know, I'm not well yet, Amy, I'm not strong—I'm not myself. . . . I was not accountable that night."

"It must be done, now, it can't be put off," she replied; "we must talk together. You are able to stand it. Have you finished?"

He rose and started toward her, his footsteps lagging, his head lowered. She waited at the door of the study and closed it behind him. He made a pretense of regaining his self-command and walked over to the loud-ticking little clock on the mantelpiece. "We will be late," he said, blinking in the bright light. "I must hasten. They are expecting me, and—and— Wait here, I will be back in half a moment."

"No, Frank; Mr. Bache will conduct the service. They will understand your not coming. I have arranged all that." She pulled the easy chair out from the desk and drew down the blinds through which the bright October sun was for the moment flooding the

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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little room. Bellwood looked about him as a man might who was judging his chances of making a desperate escape.

"Thanks. Perhaps you are right, Amy; I was really terribly afraid I'd back out at the last moment. I think—yes—I'll go take a walk; better, eh? My favorite old walk up near the quiet old burying ground to the observatory."

"There is no use of our standing," she said. She motioned to the big chair and drew up one closely fronting it. Her husband relaxed the rather dramatic attitude he had assumed upon her not answering his question, and slunk sulkily down with one elbow on the desk. Nothing but the weakness seemed to be left in his finely molded face. Well did Amy know why he wished to walk on Cemetery Hill—long she had suspected that there he kept a hidden supply of drugs.

"Frank," Amy began, "let us talk like reasonable beings who have to face things as they exist, and who must put imagination and false sentiment to one side. I am willing to start afresh—to begin a new chapter in our lives, if you will agree to help. It cannot be done without mutual help, and I dare say, although things have changed, what you may think great concessions. Shall I go on? Are you willing to listen?"

"I am listening," Bellwood replied, twirling his watch chain nervously. "What are the concessions?"

"You must resign from your pastorate here at Brimfield, and— Stop, please, I want you to hear me out."

Bellwood had half started to his feet.

"It is best that we take all this calmly and quietly," she went on. "We must leave here, and you must go

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somewhere where you can"—she paused—"get well—get stronger. Things cannot go on with you as they are now. It will all end in wreck and ruin."

Again her husband started to say something, with a movement of impatience; but she restrained him, and leaning forward placed her hand gently on his arm. "Don't you see—can't you understand—that I am trying to give you another chance?" she murmured earnestly. "Don't resent it. Remember what I said of the new chapter. I want to prepare all the pages clean and white for the writing we may do together. . . . Will you help me, Frank?"

For an instant it appeared as if Bellwood was on the point of softening—was on the verge of breaking down. Although he did not know it, the crisis of all his life had come to him, but something flashed across his mind, and, blindly, he dashed it all aside.

"Nonsense, Amy; you're talking rubbish! I must stay here and—and go on with my work. Everyone has said how good it has been. You know that, or they wouldn't be wanting me to take the parish at Antioch. Why, only a month or so ago——"

She interrupted him, shaking her head slowly. "No, it won't do, it will never do, Frank, to talk this way. We must be absolutely honest—absolutely truthful—we must understand. Don't you see? Won't you try?"

"No; I don't see any reason for all this—and, besides, it is all rubbish, as I said. It is you who are not talking sense! How could we live? Where could we go? We get this rectory free. What would we do without my salary? It is impossible."

"No; nothing is more possible. I shall come to that



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later, in due time. I do not want to review the past. I do not want to turn back one single page. I only want to talk of the future, what it *can* bring to us, not what it may."

This time Bellwood remained silent, his eyes shifting from her face to the floor and back to her face again as she continued, her voice deep and tremulous.

"We have been walking on glass stilts, Frank. At any time a little stumble might bring us down together, and we could never get up again. But now all is changed. Don't you wish to get on your feet once more, and stand firm and strong? Don't you wish to be—I will say it—cured—so that you can try to win back my regard—my respect for you? There is a part of you, Frank, that is dying—it may not be long before it is absolutely dead. Pray for strength, pray for your soul, as well as for yourself— And face the reality! You may have concealed this from those about you. True! But I have helped you conceal it. I have been the one who has drawn the screens and covered the hiding places."

She stopped. Bellwood had closed his eyes and was drawing labored breaths. How true her words had sounded to herself as she had spoken; but how differently she could have presented the existing facts. Without her help he would have come to the end long ago. She had kept him going actually from year to year, from month to month, from day to day. No one knew this. She had plenty of friends in Brimfield, many dependent upon her sympathy and aid; but she had no confidants, no intimates. She had hidden her loneliness as she had hidden her tragedy. The parish accounts, the school classes, the no-

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tices of meetings, all the business outside of the mere writing of his sermons and the delivery of them from the pulpit, had been done by her. Without her assistance the rector of St. John's could not have answered a question as to the affairs of the parish. If she refused to assist further he would be forced to an acknowledgment of his impotency, so far as accepting responsibilities was concerned. But it was not in her nature to make her attack from this standpoint. She hoped to stir some latent feeling of responsibility within him, to clear his vision, if she could, by holding out hopes that might tempt him, if he would view them from a level standpoint.

"But, Frank," she continued, after the lengthy pause, stirring him to attention with a pressure on his arm. "I do not wish to recall all that. I am going to make you a simple proposition; so clear and simple, and so full of hope for all of us, that you must think and take it in."

"What is it?" said Bellwood. "Go on! quick—I'm listening."

"We will leave here and go somewhere where we can all be near together, and where you can be taken care of. It can be done—the means are ready to our hand, as you shall see. Then when once we have started clear again, we will begin all over."

Bellwood's nervousness now was painful. He was shuddering and trembling. "I must—I must," he muttered. He shook her hand from his arm and clutched her wrist fiercely. "You know the doctor says that I can take it now and then. I have studied the matter, too, myself. It is dangerous to stop too quickly. You know it is. Listen! I must take one now, or I shall

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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scream—I can't sit still any longer. I am suffering suffering—God help me! how I am suffering!”

It was pitiful! pitiful! But even now Amy would not abandon her purpose, or the method she had decided it would be best to use, because it came most natural to her. She looked at him and there crossed her face such a mingled expression of despair, sorrow, and disgust that she felt as if it would ever mark her features.

“I will get you some water, Frank. Have you the pellets? But you must not leave until you have heard me out.”

“No! no! I'll stay—I'll stay,” he muttered, “only let me have it now. Otherwise”—he began to talk feverishly, almost incoherently—“I'll jump out of the window—I'll crush my head against the chimney. I'll—Oh, let me go—let me go!”

He worked to and fro in his chair, his hands clinched until his finger nails were deep in his palms. It looked as if he was going to lose the last control he had upon his tortured mind and limbs. The pains had begun. The clamoring, aching nerves were demanding their noxious food.

Amy had never seen him like this before. She rose frightened. Bellwood was fumbling in his vest pocket fruitlessly.

“Frank,” she cried, still resting her hand on his shoulder, “be quiet. Call upon your will; be brave!”

“No, no,” he said; “you'll find some on the top shelf in the closet in the hall—a little bottle in the finger of one of an old pair of gloves, tucked away in the corner. Bring it me and some water.”

She hastened out and in a few minutes returned to find him pacing up and down the study floor. How

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often she had heard his footsteps thus at night and had never gone to him, hoping that he could win alone; feeling that the sight of her and the knowledge that she had discovered everything, might deprive him of the prop pride gives those who fight the lonely fight. She had often heard him praying, too, and, unknown to him, had joined her prayers with his! . . . She gave him the little glass bottle, no bigger than a slate pencil, and watched him take two of the tablets and break off another between thumb and forefinger in a rough measurement. He dropped them into the glass, and almost before they had dissolved he drank the potion in great gulps. She turned her head away. She could not watch, and stood there trembling, waiting. She did not know that he had taken enough of the drug to kill three ordinary men, not inured to its habitual use. And this time it was *Hyoscine*—the only thing he could procure—but it did not sicken him.

“Thank you, Amy, dear.”

She took a step backward as she turned. His voice was so calm, so steady she would not have known it. Except for the fact that he was panting as if he had indulged in heavy exercise, he was like a different person. He walked over to the chair and sat down. She stood beside him, looking at him in wonder that was tinged with a sense of horrid fear.

“Now, we will go on,” he said. “You were saying—”

It was she who felt now like giving way.

“Oh, Frank,” she cried, “it is dreadful—it is too dreadful! Where will it end? Where will it end?”

“I’m all right,” replied her husband. “Now—Don’t take on so, Amy. I’m using them less and less.

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANC

Soon I shall break myself of it completely. And I shall do it alone—alone—without the help of any devil watching and restrictions! Don't fear for me. I may have a little, and then still less, and then some day, God helping me, I'll put it all aside—throw it away, and never want to touch it. . . . But, oh, just now the relief, the blessed relief! I feel as if I could preach again—and they want me—they want me!”

He opened his hands wide and stretched his arms. The ego of the man was the only thing that loomed through the fog or flare of his drug-depressed or drug-stimulated personality. She still stared at him, her fingers to her pale lips.

“Can't you go on, now?” he said. “See, I'm right. You were speaking of going away somehow and I said it was rubbish—don't you remember?”

“Yes, Frank, I do, but——”

She did not know how to continue. It was harder to talk to him thus than to reason with him as he had been before.

“Sit down, Amy,” he said. “I'm sorry to have had you see me the way I was, but you insisted on my coming in here, and it was my time for— I am reasonable. Why don't you go on?”

He turned and looked out of the window and a change came into his expression. With a droning hum and a cloud of dust, Mrs. Rice's red auto car had flashed by.

“Frank,” said Amy, “I am going to sum it all in one question: Will you go away with me? Frank, listen to what I have to say— I haven't——”

“And where, and how, and with what? Where can we get any money to travel with? I told you that if

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was not for my salary here— Haven't I always given your mother some of that? The ravens fed Elijah, but alas! impecunious ministers have to help feed themselves."

"But, Frank, I have money now, and so has my mother. We have plenty! Judge Hollins says that we ought to have nearly eight thousand dollars a year! Think of it! Think of it! What it means to her, and to the children, and to you and me."

Bellwood's face darkened. He rose from the chair and pushed it back.

"And where did you get this money?" he asked. "Where did this miraculous fortune come from?"

To see him no one would have recognized the huddled cringing figure in the chair of less than an hour ago.

"It was some stocks—some mining stock," she replied, "that my father left. We had thought it worthless, but now it seems it has come to be of value, and yesterday Judge Hollins sold it for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Don't you see how it changes everything?"

"Yes," said Bellwood, "I see how it changes everything. . . . Let me ask you a few questions."

His voice was as clear and decided as a lawyer's might be who examined a witness on the stand.

"You only heard of this yesterday?"

"Yes."

"And Lawrence Kellogg is in town again? Did you know that?"

"I did," said Amy, her gray eyes steel blue in their intensity.

"And you never thought that this wonderful 'value

with troubles of the nerves. Yes—  
kill them there! Know that? I rem-  
once—‘He’d be glad to see me d  
you——”

“Stop it, I command you!”

Never before had tones like those  
Bellwood’s lips. It had been long s  
sounded from them—laughter had see  
but never before had they closed the w  
that stern, imperious order.

Bellwood turned and faced her.  
of his dual personality that had been  
strong draught he had taken, had giv  
poise, but now even that was slightly  
caught his balance again, she went on.

“How dare you speak to me like t  
such a thing? How dare you! I don’t  
you; but let me tell you that I know th  
it not been for my mother—and I forg  
have told you before this! You! wh  
people from the pulpit, and prayed to a  
ness you commended! H—”

## THE BREAKING

depth of generous selfgiving you could never understand!"

Bellwood gazed back at her and drew up to full height. Even as she looked at him she could not persuade herself that it was not a different man from her husband, though his face was pale, his burning eyes were steady, and the hand raised above his head did not shake, except with anger.

"And you loved him—loved him, too! Deny it? Don't I know what he said? Don't I remember what I saw and heard when I lay there on that sick-bed? I was not dreaming! You love him!"

Again the strange tones came into her voice.

"I do," she said. "And to myself and to you—yes! and in my prayers, I have told it and will tell it. It seems, now, as if always I must have loved him."

"You glory in it, do you?"

"I am not ashamed! I am the mother of your children. I owe to them the debt of keeping them always able to look their mother in the face, to hear her name spoken, when they grow older, with the pride that children feel for mothers that are good—and that have been good to them! Lawrence Kellogg will not seek to see me. We have parted for all time. I honor him, yes, and love him. Yet, because I believed I had chosen my path—I had done so because I had thought it right—he never sought to turn me from it——"

Suddenly she paused—a weakness seized her—her hands sought behind her the back of the big chair; she rested against it, her chin lowered on her breast. For the first time she took in the force of the insinuation. What if it was true? What if it was Lawrence's money? Then she remembered Judge Hollins's exaggerated ac-



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count of his behavior. That had rung false to her at the time, but she had placed another construction upon it—another meaning. To her, then, it had seemed but a well-meant plea that they should meet, and she had answered it in terms that had told her story—explained openly her position. Now, all was different! Again the castles that she had reared, this time herself, came tumbling about her—turret and wall and battlement, and the high spires of the chapel in which she had hoped to go and pray; the weight crushed her—almost bore her down! The mists, the blinding mists, that had always closed out the horizon of her Hope Country were so close that she could not see one footstep before her on the way. She felt that if she moved she would stumble, and fall amid the ruins that she could put out her hands and touch.

Bellwood had not broken the long silence. All at once there sounded from a distance back of the house, toward the lane that ran to the valley road, a sharp and continued hooting of a horn. She kept wondering what it was. The bell of the little clock on the mantle whirred and struck loudly. A shadow crossed the floor, the hinges of the door creaked, carriage wheels and horses' hoofs sounded from the road.

Service would soon be out at the church, she thought. No; it could not be so late as that! She looked up. She was alone.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE CONFLICTING FORCE

**A** SCRUBBY-LOOKING setter dog padded in and out among the stunted oaks and birches that lined the wood road following the crest of Snake Hill. In the road itself stood a rough-looking man with a gun swinging in the hollow of his arm. The fact that it was the Sabbath, and that being out with a gun afforded an opportunity to break the law, may have been one of the inducements that had started Pat Tevelin out so early. At all events, Brimfield's black sheep had been tramping the hills since early dawn, and not fruitlessly, as the bulging side pockets of his dirty canvas shooting coat betrayed. The reports of his gun had started the echoes long before anyone in the village was astir.

The scrubby setter was already tired; his lolling tongue and lowered flag showed plainly a lost ambition; he had investigated a thicket where the traces of a flown bird had lifted for an instant his tail and his spirits, and giving it up, came scrambling out through the branches of a fallen beech tree into the road ahead of his master, who with a wave of his hand sent him in the other direction, snuffing and pottering over the leaves.

All at once the hunter turned and with a start threw

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back the hammers of the cheap breechloader. Then a smile crossed his face.

Standing stockstill in the road, with head and tail up, the stiff bristles on his back erect with inquiry, was a big, rough-haired terrier. They stood there watching one another, the admiration, it must be confessed, all on Mr. Tevelin's side. Suddenly the setter broke from cover, and the terrier, as if a man with a gun counted for nothing, came forward, gingerly and haughtily, to investigate.

While the two dogs were making a suspicious acquaintance, a figure came in sight, striding strongly along up the rough path.

"Hello! Good morning, doctor!"

"Good morning, Pat! Any luck to-day?"

"Four old ones, sir; two down in the holler, and two back of Schultze's. Somebody's been shooting here yesterday; there's fresh shells all through the woods. Birds ain't plenty; last spring was too wet. . . . That's a fine dog of yours; I seen him often."

The two men were now close together and shook hands.

"How's the baby, Pat?"

"Doin' fine; and the woman's well, too. All of us is well. . . . D'ye ever shoot, sir? The woodcock ought to be comin' in with the next moon."

"I'm very fond of it," Lawrence said. "But I haven't been out here since I was a boy. I could find all the good covers, though."

He began to ask about them, knowingly; there was not a foot of ground within miles of Brimfield that he had not explored in the way that only a schoolboy does explore, familiar with each fallen log, each big gray

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bowlder, and all the stepping-stones at the brook crossing.

"You might be wantin' a good bird dog some day," Mr. Tevelin suggested, with a meaning look at the scrubby setter.

"I'm afraid not just now, Pat. I'll be going off very soon."

"Shure, that's too bad. There'll be many here that'll miss you. But you'll be comin' back again?"

"I don't know about that. Not for a long time anyhow."

"It's a dead, dull place, sir, shure. I don't blame you. And the meanest lot of people on the face of the green earth. And with all their importing them Dagos and rotten foreigners, it's all an honest man can do to get a day's work. I'll leave a couple o' birds at your house as I go by. Oh, no, don't think o' that, sir. I wouldn't take money fer 'em—not from the likes of you, anyhow. You're a gintlemin and they're scarce—scarce as this year's birds—and that's sayin' a good deal. . . . Well, good day to you, sir."

Mr. Tevelin's salute told that at some time in the past he must have been in service. When in his cups—which was frequent—Pat had often referred mysteriously to a knowledge of great men and good horses, and if, in his judgment of the former, he had been somewhat soured, his knowledge of the latter stood him to good advantage, for his reputation as a veterinary ranked even higher than that of McGrath, the farrier.

As Lawrence strode away, whistling to the terrier, who had concluded that the setter was not his class, and after the preliminaries had dropped the acquaintance,

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Pat followed the retreating figures of man and dog with a judging eye.

“Them’s two thoroughbreds,” he said to himself—  
“and thoroughbreds is few. . . . Come on, Tim! Hey! quit that! If you’ll find me another bird, I’ll buy you some flea powder.”

Tossing his gun on his shoulder, Mr. Tevelin and the setter disappeared in the oaks.

Lawrence was walking at the top of his speed, his shoulders thrown back, and an African knob-kerri that he carried for a walking stick, tucked under his arm. His mental condition was such that only the most strenuous exercise could afford him any relief. He had started out early, with the firm determination of bringing at least a tired body to his couch, hoping that the fatigue might help him to sleep better than he had for the past few nights. After stopping at the post office and mailing a bulky, registered packet, he had sent word to the hotel that he would not see Judge Hollins until the evening. He had purposely taken himself beyond the danger and the temptation of a meeting with Amy Bellwood. Could she possibly suspect his hand in the purchase of the Mexican mining stock? If she did, he knew that he never would become possessed of that excellent material for fire kindling, and he half feared, also, that the knowledge of his attempt to place her unconsciously in his debt might give her some offense.

But what else was there to have done? He could not leave Brimfield feeling that at any time she might be thrown upon the charity of the neighbors, with a wreck of a husband, a dying mother, an aged aunt, who would soon be too old even for her light duties at the village

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library, to take care of, and the two little ones to feed and educate! It was only a question of time when Bellwood would bring things to a crisis through his own behavior, and then what? Amy seeking for work! Perhaps having to live on a nurse's or a schoolmarm's pittance, or, if worst came to worst, applying at the mill. And the children! God! How the thought of it shocked him! He remembered the feeling that he had experienced at the sight of those tapering fingers scarred and roughened with needle pricks. Perhaps some day Bellwood might take an overdose! That would be——”

He started walking faster than ever, raising his eyes, that had been following the path before him, seeking for something visual that might distract his thought. He was at the end of the wood road, where it dwindled into the clearing. The ground sloped steeply and he had a clear view of the valley, away to the straight horizon that marked the edge of the great lake. To his left ran the river, and on the farther side rose the wooded hills, rusty and brown in their autumn covering, patches of pines showing dark along the summits. A few of the maples still kept their gorgeous gowns and gleamed here and there, like points of fire.

He stopped for a minute and, lifting one foot to a tree stump, leaned across his knee. In two weeks from now he would be on the ocean, and then where? The Riviera? Egypt? No; the place came to him suddenly! No! There among the seekers of pleasure, it was too soft, too balmy, all too easy. Yes, that was it! The cold, the ice, the long, long day, and the long night; the place where the stars stood still and the sun and moon traveled the rim of the world, where it

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would be fight—fight, for the things to eat, and work, ever work, toward the great indefinite; where degrees of latitude added glory to men's names! There came to his mind the expedition that would be fitted out that year by a wealthy British patron of the sciences. They would need a surgeon. He knew some people whose influence could be brought to bear. It was not the North, though, it was the Antarctic. Well, what was the odds? It was the same thing; it was the actual, and the fight would be there! There was another thing which he did not dwell upon, in fact, would not let come into his mind. His manner of living abroad would necessarily have to be changed, his expenses cut down somewhat. He was not a wealthy man, but now his fortune was little more than cut in two. At least, with all his soul, he hoped it was.

Having something before his mind other than the immediate present seemed to give him comfort. He drew a long breath and took up his walk. As he crossed the clearing he stopped once more to look at the familiar view. The chances were that his eyes might never rest on it again. About five miles away a big white edifice crowned the top of the smooth hill that rose sweepingly from the brown masses of the woods—the Antioch Country Club, made possible to the dwellers of the county seat by the new trolley line and the auto car. It lay twelve miles from the town itself, whose position from the hilltop could be plainly seen. When he had first come back to Brimfield he had been asked by some Antioch acquaintances to become a subscriber. He had been there only once, but the idea occurred to him that he might walk there and get his lunch, then afterwards back to Brimfield, and that would put a good bit over

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twenty miles to his credit for the day. It gave him a definite object, too, and he strode along less stiffly, his muscles more relaxed. In an hour or so he had come to the entrance gates. For the last few minutes he had been following the dusty highway. It was a relief to get away from it.

There were many people on the links; girls in tam-o'-shanters and crumpled panamas; young men, for the most part bareheaded, their older fellows given to thick stockings, deer-stalker caps, and brilliant-hued, sleeved waistcoats. He knew none of them, which suited his mood exactly. The sight of a tall young woman, whose figure somehow reminded him of Amy, gave him a sudden pang of hopeless loneliness.

Robin Adair had trotted across one of the putting greens to make overtures of friendship to a much-betrimmed poodle, when suddenly Lawrence heard his name called. He turned. It was Dr. Walter Smith from Antioch beckoning to him from his French run-about. Lawrence approached.

Dr. Smith was, by all means, the best-known surgeon in that part of the State. He was a tall, slender man four or five years Lawrence's senior, a bachelor, prematurely gray, with a distinguished-looking brow and eyes.

"Hello, Kellogg!" he hailed warmly. "I wish I'd known you were coming over. You are a stranger here. Did you walk?"

"Yes, I came across country."

"That's sensible. With all the methods of transportation supplied by horseflesh and gasoline, the leg muscles of the future generation would become atrophied if it wasn't for golf, or tennis. I expected to put in



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a day of it myself, here, but got a confounded call to get back to town in a hurry. That's the worst of our profession, isn't it? Our time is never our own." He lowered his voice. "By the way, how is that poor creature, Bellwood? Oh, I forgot, I beg your pardon; I remember now you told me you're not attending him. There's no accounting for the whims of those twisted-minded dopers. Strange that the people over there are not onto the trouble; they ought to know. That beautiful wife of his has kept him up, though; for my part, I don't think he's worth a nacker's rap." The two men flashed a simultaneous glance.

"I have been away," said Lawrence, standing close to the bubbling, shuddering car, "so I can give you no news, but I would like to ask about it. What do you think are his chances?"

"Chances? He's a goner. That's my opinion. But, then, everything taken into account, his vitality is surprising. He may live ten years! There is only one thing to do, of course. He ought to go to Peyton's Sanitarium. It may kill or cure him, or he may pop off some day, all by himself. You know"—the voluble doctor smiled and drew Lawrence closer to him—"they're still talking of asking him to take the church here. I think they want a Sabbath sensation as an antidote for all this!" He waved to the links. "Funny secrets we doctors have, aren't they? I don't think he'll preach much longer. I'm looking to see him take a bend in some other direction, but you never can tell. . . . I must be going. Hope I'll see you here some day. Good-by."

The doctor hauled in the clutch lever and the car shot forward.

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Lawrence stopped at the stables and left poor Robin Adair to howl in a box stall, and went on up to the clubhouse. It was early for luncheon, but he was hungry. After furbishing up a bit, he came out on the veranda and seated himself at one of the tables inside the glass-closed space. He had almost finished his meal, eating in the preoccupied way of the lonely man, when suddenly looking up, he almost started.

Only two tables from him sat Mrs. Rice! She was not looking at him, but was listening to what the man opposite to her, whose back was toward him, was saying. The widow's face was slightly flushed and she was toying with the stem of a cocktail glass. The man was talking earnestly, leaning forward, his big shoulders drawn up, both arms sprawled on the table.

Lawrence took a good look at Mrs. Rice's face. It was certainly handsome in its way, heavily handsome, because of her fine eyes and rich, full lips. But he noticed something he had never seen before—two little hard lines at the corners of the mouth. Her face was rather set, and suddenly when she spoke, although he could not hear, the words seemed to snap bitterly, almost angrily, from her, as if they had burned her tongue. The man in front of her said something and half turned. Lawrence recognized the florid, strong-willed face of Mr. Murger. The widow had given a petulant toss to her head at what her companion was saying, and just then her eye caught Lawrence's. Her expression changed. She gave a startled little smile, and then spoke across Murger's shoulder.

"Well!" she cried, "you've come out of your brown study, have you? I tried to attract your atten-

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tion when I first came in, but you were boring holes in the tablecloth. . . . What are you doing here?"

"I just walked over; it was a good day for it."

"I thought you were in New York," smiled Mrs. Ned.

Mr. Murger had lolled back in his chair, half listening. All at once he swung about and gave Lawrence a short nod of recognition.

"Do I win my bet?" asked Mrs. Rice. "Or are you going to continue playing John the Hermit for the rest of your life? Do I win my bet?" Mrs. Ned repeated.

Lawrence was rising. He had finished all he wanted of his luncheon and rather wished to end the colloquy.

"Yes," he replied, "I think you may win, now."

"Ah, ha!" laughed the widow. "I told you so! I want to see you! I've a crow to pick. You'll forgive my saying it, but you're looking awfully well!"

He thanked her, and with a short bow that included Mr. Murger, who hardly replied, went into the clubhouse. He had stopped at the desk to pay his bill, when a waiter halted at his elbow and spoke to the steward.

"Who's that for?" asked the man of importance, addressing the waiter.

"Mrs. Rice; she's going to take it with her." The man held in his hand a paper parcel. He dictated its contents—"a cold bird, lettuce sandwiches, a pint of champagne," and so on. Getting his check, he departed. Lawrence strolled into the reading room to wait a few minutes before beginning his homeward journey. He had picked up an illustrated paper and settled himself in a chair, when all at once the same waiter he had

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seen before entered and attracted his attention with a polite cough and a bow.

“Mrs. Rice would like to speak with you, sir. She’s at the entrance to the ladies’ room—this way, sir.”

Wondering what the widow might have to say, and not a little irritated, Lawrence followed down the hallway. Mrs. Ned was waiting at the door, the paper parcel held under her arm; her face was flushed, her eyes excited.

“Well!” she greeted nervously. “How d’ye do?” She extended her hand, waiting for the servant to get out of earshot. As soon as she was assured of it, she gave a look behind her into the empty room. Her manner changed; she spoke with nervous quickness.

“Listen—you must do something for me! You must be ‘a squire of dames’ for my sake, if only for a minute—you must! Don’t refuse me.”

“What is it? What can I do?” His tone was a little cold.

“That fool! that meddling ass you saw me with is behaving!— Oh, I wish I was a man!” The hard lines at her mouth deepened.

“What can I do?” It was by an effort, now, he did not show his disinclination.

“He wants to follow me; he— You see I have my car waiting in the back road. I walked up here a few minutes ago, across lots. I didn’t wish to— I sent my chauffeur off on an errand and told him to meet me there; it’s time I got back; I’ve got some luncheon for him here.” She paused and tried to make her manner more easy. “Now I’ll tell you where you come in.”

“Yes?”

“I don’t *want* him to follow me. I’m sick and tired

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of him! That's the worst of having anything to do with a man who isn't really a gentleman. You'll always regret it sooner or later!" Mrs. Ned seemed to have some difficulty in coming to the point. "Oh, don't think me a—a horrid nuisance," she flustered on, "but I had to! I told him that my line of talk with you was all a bluff—and that I really came here to meet *you*, you see, and that you were going off with me in the car!" Mrs. Ned's nonrealization of the extent of her assumption was awe-inspiring. He gazed at her blankly.

"But——"

"Oh, don't be frightened—you're *not*. You've only got to walk across the links with me as far as the spring house in the hollow, beyond the fourth tee, and there we'll say good-by. I don't want you to come any farther. You'll do this for me like a sweet lamb, won't you? Then you can wander at your own free will. . . . If you only knew——!"

It was like being asked by a woman with her arms full to open a door. He could not refuse, though he felt distinct resentment.

"Of course I'll go with you. Will you wait till I get my dog? He's down at the stables."

"Don't be long. I'll meet you—what a dear you are!—just outside on the edge of the green."

Lawrence hurried off. He could not help being a bit amused at first and then it all struck him. Why, of course, it was as plain as day! Frank Bellwood was waiting for her in the car! It was true! The end was coming sooner than he expected. He recalled the minister's words that day on the hilltop: "She's a destroyer of lives—an obliterator of ideals!" Pah—the cur! . . . But that did not let him out of his agreement with Mrs.

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Rice. It was better perhaps that he should hurry. It might prevent a disagreeable meeting with Wilford Murger; he did not seek for that under the circumstances.

Mrs. Rice was waiting for him, standing close against an angle of the clubhouse, apparently absorbed in watching a fozzling putting match between two old gentlemen, who straightened themselves up after each stroke with grunts of self-derision.

“Oh, what a lovely dog!” She snapped her fingers knowingly. Robin Adair, although he generally regarded women with suspicion, and cared little for caresses, sidled toward her and jumped up against her skirt. “You dear old darling!” she went on, roughing the bristles on his back. “Isn’t he fine? Oh, they know, don’t they?”

To hear Mrs. Ned speak one might have thought her an enthusiastic schoolgirl. In truth, her enthusiasm was not in the least put on, and having found her way out of an immediate trouble she had forgotten it.

“Come on, Orlando; you do look well in hose! I was sure you would. We’ll stroll along.”

He thought it better not to offer to carry her bundle; she did not seem at all eager to relinquish it. They slowly made their way over the well-kept turf that sloped to the edge of the woods. Somehow he felt uncomfortable, but it did not show in the least except by his silence. Mrs. Ned was entirely at her ease. She pointed out a group of young people and told him their names, with the addition of some gossip; he displayed a polite interest. Before they descended from the crest, when the clubhouse would be out of view, she turned, looked back, and laughed mischievously.

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“Aha! there he stands! Oh! such language—as he is thinking! How I hate that man! a bear, a boar, a bull, and a snake rolled into one!—with a good deal of an ass thrown in,” she added. “He has all the bad manners and insistence of a connection by marriage! How he ever could have thought that I . . . He’ll love *you* after this—I don’t think very much! He’ll be your enemy for life!” Mrs. Ned looked Lawrence up and down. “But I guess you can stand it. You see that comes of helping ladies in distress! Seriously, though, I’m greatly in your debt. I can never repay you.”

“Don’t mention it, pray. I don’t think there was any love lost between Mr. Murger and myself before this happened.”

“So? He wasn’t very cordial, was he?”

“Not very. He and I were on opposite sides.”

“You mean the election; I wish I was a man. I’d have beaten him if it took every vote I had. I didn’t expect to see him here, I’ve avoided him for weeks. . . . I don’t think you need come any farther, Orlando. Here we are in the wood—quite the proper place to part. I’d offer to take you home if I could; but I’m going to make some calls and pick up some people, and any farther would take you out of your way. Good-by.”

Mrs. Ned extended her hand, took his and held it. Lawrence withdrew it gently; she took no offense.

“How is a certain affair progressing?” she asked unabashed. There was no answer. “I wish you had liked me,” she added, “but you didn’t; I’m not your style. You like slender women, don’t you?”

Lawrence made no reply; he gazed up at a blue jay that had commenced its “stop thief” from the top of



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a maple, and waited for the widow to answer her own question, stop, or go on.

“We’ve got to part, Orlando.”

“I’ve a long walk ahead; yes, I’m afraid so.”

He lifted his cap, and avoiding the lady’s eye turned and left her, taking a path that led in the direction of Brimfield and that would not bring him again in sight of the clubhouse.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE RESCUE

**H**E had heard the faint roar of the starting engine before he had gone many hundred yards, but even if he could have seen the car he could not have told much. The canopy and back were up, and in the recess of the tonneau was a man with a big pair of goggles with flaps; the widow, laughing heartily, was unfolding the luncheon in his lap.

The wind that had blown hard at intervals during the morning had gone down entirely. The woods were silent, so silent that a busy nuthatch, bustling and thumping at the dry bark of a tree, sounded like a reckless robber breaking into an empty house; the "chug-chir-rr" of a red squirrel, who scolded at the far-ranging Robin Adair from the limb of a spruce, was loud as a watchman's rattle.

Lawrence's fast footsteps beat up the dry leaves in short surges of sound, like the steady panting of machinery. He struck a hollow trunk a blow with his knobkerri, and it echoed like the report of a gun! At last he broke from the woods at the highway and, in order not to return by the way he had come, whistled for Robin Adair and, turning to the left, crossed the old covered bridge over the river and took to the hills again. He knew of another path that led along there, climbing

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the western slope, and that came out into the cuplike meadow, two miles away from where the river curved under the railway bridge opposite Brimfield.

He was a good walker, and never once did he stop for breath. The exhilaration of his expanding lungs started the blood through his veins and lessened the pressure he felt at his temples; for he had been thinking hard—thinking as fast as he had been going! Did Amy know of her husband's defection? Had she really wanted to see him as Judge Hollins had suggested? What a lot of harm and what a lot of good were wrapped up in some natures! There was Mrs. Rice! He felt no resentment toward her. Why should he? Most of what she did, that was harmful, was not her fault. She had been born, as a great many women and not a few men are born, with an absolute unappreciation of the value of consequences. That kind of a nature was the least selfish in the world; because it never reasoned either about giving or taking. It gave and took without conscience; and what it did not feel or appreciate in itself it could not appreciate or feel in others. "Men were her game." Bellwood had said that! Yes! Sometimes she played with them as if they were toys and sometimes as if they were weapons—which added a zest to it. But she never reasoned that toys broke and weapons were really dangerous. She played fair, according to her lights, which meant that if she cheated she was not aware of it. And she took her gains, like a true gambler, with a pleased feeling that it was right, and stood her losses without any crying or bitterness. She wouldn't have drowned a mouse, and she would have taken a lame street dog to her bosom with tears of commiseration and much practical bandaging. But

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she took no more thought of her dealings with masculine human beings—except to pay a dilatory attention to a few conventions, that in her heart she detested—than would a kindly giantess of the manlets she fattened to tempt her appetite, or let go free out of whimsey. He knew her kind; only generally they were so placed by circumstances in the world that they did more taking than giving! No; he felt no resentment toward her. Brains and good looks, in her belief, were only a means of attack and defense—and a good reason for both. Ignorance was a valid excuse for not playing the game at all, and was to be pitied and left alone. The lack of delicacy in her parting insinuation he had hardly noticed.

But Franklin Bellwood! the damnable habit might be accountable for his behavior, his bold disregard of duties, and his surrender to his baser, lower, long-concealed other self. *Corruptio optimi pessima!* Only was he ever of even a good alloy?

Mrs. Rice was incapable of understanding such a nature and soul as Amy Bellwood possessed any more than she could be supposed to understand the ethics of Mars. Despite her mental alertness, Mrs. Ned had never a thought above her eyebrows—except, perhaps, as to how she might arrange her hair. But Bellwood again! If he had been doing this out of reckless perversity, and if he had still believed Amy loved him, Lawrence could have twisted his neck as he might that of a pipped chicken—past saving—and sheer good riddance. But, of course, all that was beside the question! Bellwood in his suffering moments of sane thinking realized that he was an outcast and, in his obsession, was content in the forgetting; and Lawrence appreciated this also, al-

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though he realized that it meant absolute hopelessness and deepened the misery.

He halted so suddenly that the tired terrier, who had done with his roaming, collided against his heels. He struck madly at the bushes with the heavy stick. Oh, no, no—*no!* He would never dare do that! She would never listen to him; it would cause even greater ruin than all that had gone before. But, oh! why were people so hemmed in by cruel circumstance? Why was it ordained that there should be so much undeserved suffering meted out to those who were unmeriting of anything except the good? In the pathetic little note, that he would carry to the day he died, she had spoken of him as her “knight.” Would he let that knight-hood lapse? Would he run the risk of destroying it? Again he reiterated an emphatic negative in his own self-parleying. He threw back his head and started down the hill. A partridge burst with a heart-lifting whir at his feet. He hardly followed its flight, he was so absorbed. On ran his thought. Before the evening was over he would have seen the judge, and then? He wondered if it would not be best to tell him the whole story to secure his coöperation in carrying out the future. It might be better. But he answered “no” to this again; he had been so genuine, so disinterested, so childishly delighted. It was better to leave things as they were.

He had been keeping up such a gait during the early part of the afternoon, that he was surprised at his own speed and the ground that he covered. To his left was a thicket of pines, the open spaces underneath their boughs fragrant with resinous odors and soft with the fallen needles. If he left the path here and worked

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his way through, he would come out at the end of the pasture that sloped down to the cup-like meadow, and there he could see what progress had been made in the completion of the waterworks; for the meadow itself was soon to be transformed into a reservoir for the supply of water both to Brimfield and Kenton Falls. The river, owing to the pollution from the mills above, had been declared unsafe for a year. A clear, large brook that had never gone dry ran through the meadow and between the hills that dipped together to its lower end where the dam was building. The late troubles there, owing to the labor situation, had filled the columns of the Brimfield local paper for months. Politics had been mixed up in it, and there was bitter feeling. Lawrence had heard the judge talk about it by the hour!

He ducked under the low boughs and, with Robin Adair still close to heel, forced his way into the open through the tangle of blackberry bushes and came to the stone fence surmounted by its decaying rails. He paused in astonishment. The meadow was no longer there! In its place was a sheet of water that ran back for half a mile, and was almost that in width. The great iron standpipe rose at the edge of the dam and below it he could see the roof of the little brick pumping station with its chimney. Lining the bank on the opposite side was the settlement of the rebellious workers—mud huts and tar-papered shanties. The post road from Antioch curved at the bottom of the hill, and then, swinging like the letter S, crossed the narrow valley the brook followed, in an old-fashioned wooden bridge. Two miles away ran the river and, on the far hill and in the nearer hollow, lay the white houses of

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Brimfield. He heard the bell in the clock tower—how mellow it sounded! He could make out some of the outbuildings on his own estate, and to the southeast the red gables of Elmside.

He had paused to take all this in, as he had the view of the morning, not knowing when it would greet his eyes again. How fine it would be when the pines would show black against the snow! How beautiful when the spring swept blossoming northward! He might long to see it some time, very possibly when he should be feeling the biting winds of the ice floes; for he had settled the question of his ulterior destination in his mind, when first he thought of it.

A shout attracted his attention. He glanced nearer, at the dam. There were some figures moving there, and a man ran out from among them toward the road. Two or three followed him. The running figure turned. Lawrence gave a cry of consternation! Apparently, without any warning, one of the pursuers had lifted a heavy club and felled the man before him to the ground. Then all the others swarmed around, jumping, kicking, and stamping, at the prostrate figure.

Lawrence Kellogg let a roar from his lips, part of warning and part in mad protest. Blood all atingle, he started down the hill, flourishing his heavy stick, the fight lust rising! The terrier ran beside him, barking in an ecstasy of excitement. The first fence, four feet in the clear, he took like a steeple chaser in his stride; but it was heavy going there, the ground filled with tussocks and moss hags. Beyond rose a high fence of barbed wire. He was clambering over it, when he saw another figure cross quickly from the road and run down toward the surging group whose voices, wild with fury,

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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reached him. It was a woman! She plunged at the beasts as a trainer might, who knew her power lay in not showing fear! They fell back, surprised into a stumbling, half-cowering retreat. Swiftly she bent, lifted the fallen man against her knee and turned, daring them to come nearer!

It seemed as if something burst within him. Everything went crimson-colored. . . . God! God! *It was Amy!*

He dashed across the intervening space, leaping a ditch that would have staggered him in his college days and jumped the full ten feet to the ground below the dam!


Never had the miserable, cowardly assailants seen a man like this before. He roared at them like a charging bull! The first went down—only his uplifted arm saving his skull; the second drew a pistol, but before he could raise it, the knob-kerri caught him across the throat, and staggering, he fell backward across a bowlder; the third, bending, picked up the dropped weapon, and with a snarling face snapped it twice! It failed him, and a crushing blow—the fist this time! a swing from the hip, the weight of the shoulder—made ruin of his features! Another man slunk out from the base of the standpipe and scurried off, plashing through the water, Robin Adair snapping at his heels! The rest now turned in flight, running along the edge of the masonry that rose above them, calling in wild, foreign tongues, as a driven-in outpost might to alarm a camp.

He turned to her swiftly now. She was watching him with large eyes, her lips moving. Why should not her knight have come to her in this hour? She was



't stay here,' he implored. 'Leave me alone.'"





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## THE RESCUE

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still half lifting the beaten, bleeding figure on the ground and did not rise to meet him.

"Amy! Amy!" he panted hoarsely. "What are you doing here? For God's sake, what is happening? Who is it?"

"Oh, the cowards! the cowards!" she replied, her voice vibrating strangely. "Larry! Larry! I can't tell you. They were murdering him! Oh, he's alive!—Listen! he's saying something he wants us to hear—Yes, yes, we are helping you!"

The man had put one hand on Lawrence's knee as he sank down beside him, the other was shaking Amy's elbow. He raised eyes that did not look human, out of a face a jumble of blood and dirt, but they caught his words: "They're—going—to—blow—up—dam. Quick! Call the—town— Wire—water!" That was all they could make out before his head fell back.

"It's Timms, the constable. I know him," Amy said breathlessly. "They've almost killed him! Did you see them? O Larry! Larry! to think of your coming!" She cleared the wrecked face with the edge of her skirt. "What shall we do?"

In reply, Lawrence stooped and picked the man up in his arms and, despite the weight of his burden, carried him up the bank to the roadway and across it halfway up the slope on the other side where a spring trickled out of a wooden pipe driven into the bank. He laid him down and dashed some water in his face. The man spoke again, but painfully and indistinctly.

"Telephone—in—power house—they—drove—me—out. . . . Call up town— Factories—don't stop— for—me—help—help— Have—they—cut—wire?" .

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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Lawrence glanced over his shoulder. No; there it ran from the ridge of the power house to the pole only a few feet away! He jumped to his feet and scrambled down the slope. The door of the little house was open. He ran inside, giving a glimpse along the dam. He could see, at the farther end, a group of men working furiously, one plying a heavy sledge. There was the telephone instrument on the wall! one of the kind that require a twisting of the handle to call the central office. He rang sharply! . . . Oh, would they ever answer? He almost tore it from the wall in his anxiety to get connection. . . . The door that had closed behind him opened. He whirled about with closed fists and a swift glance for a weapon.

Amy stood there at the entrance.

"It isn't Brimfield he wants!" she cried. "It's Kenton Falls—the factory there—they're mending the dam at the mill—the Esterbrook. It will go out—and sweep the valley! Call them up! oh, call them up!"

He had the connection now! . . . A voice was answering! Before he replied he turned to her.

"Don't stay here," he implored. "Leave me alone. Go back to the road!"

She shook her head.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE END OF SILENCE

**W**HILE he was talking, Amy never took her eyes from his face; she thought how the man at the Esterbrook must be hanging on every cool, clear-spoken word. She came nearer until she stood beside him.

He seemed to know exactly what to do: "Open the sluice gates at the Kenton Falls dam, warn the people in the factory tenements that line the banks below." He did not even tell them who he was; the tones of his voice were warrant for authority. There were no houses in the brook valley that would be endangered. The only thing that might go was the crazy old wooden bridge. As he finished Amy grasped his sleeve and pointed out the heavily barred window.

"See!" she cried. "They're running. See them? see them? Look! . . . And oh, here's a man quite close— He's climbing the other bank!"

He caught her round the waist. "Hurry!" he said, "quick, quick. We must get out!"

Before they reached the door there sounded an explosion that almost hurled them down. It was followed instantly by another farther off. The brick building shook, the lock closed just as his fingers touched the knob. There was a grinding, roaring sound outside!

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

He threw his weight against the door. It would not open, though he felt it shaking as if under a giant hand! Water spurted over his feet from the lintel. He glanced at the window to the left. From every crevice streams were spouting and behind the glass, that had stood the shock, climbed a yellow, leaping flood. It rose higher and higher—he realized what had happened! The masonry support for the standpipe had been blown out and the huge tower had fallen! The tons of water were escaping from the top as if from a mighty bottle fallen on its side. He turned and looked at Amy, who had clutched his arm. "We are caught like rats!" he groaned. "We can't get out! Why did you follow me? Why? God help us—we can't get out! O Amy—Amy—love!"

There was so much turmoil outside from the bubbling, boiling water that she did not catch the words. She simply looked at him; her other hand stole across his breast and found his shoulder. He drew her close. . . . There was a loud, splintering crash! The glass panes of the window back of the iron bars could not withstand it longer. The force burst in, flooding the pit below, swamping the banked fires, in a roar of steam, muddy spray, and swirling water. In an instant it had filled the place and rose swiftly to their knees. Another second and it had reached their waists. Yet not a word was spoken—not a whisper. Once he sobbed helplessly! He drew her still tighter, both arms about her, and looked down at her white face—so lovely pure, so young! Her eyes were shut; but her lips were quivering. The current, whirling inside the building, as it might inside a turbine case, swept them off their feet and carried them staggering against the farther,

## THE END OF SILENCE

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smaller window which had gone out like the first. He caught the bars with one hand and thrust back against the pressure. He could look out down the valley. It was filled with a raging, yellow torrent as far as he could see. And as the water rose the roaring ceased!

“Are we going to die?”

She was speaking in awed tones, but not in fear. He looked into her eyes, and as he did so she stole her arms about his neck and pressed her face to his.

“Let me tell you,” she murmured. “I know! I know! there was no other woman— You would have come back to me! Tell me! tell me! Let me hear you say it— There was no other, then——”

“No! no!” he cried, his kisses quenching his broken words. “I lied to you! There was not— There never was! It was you—you—always you. O Amy—love! love! why did life treat us so? Why were we robbed? God! we must live! we must—we must!”

“It’s better this way,” she replied. “I know all you’ve done for me—all, everything! You are mine now, mine. Ah! that dear, blessed lie! I love you, Lawrence, so much, so much, so much! I am glad to die with you. Just think!—together! you and I. . . . Ah, at last! at last! . . . See how brave, how glad I am. . . . Look, dear! Look at me. Hold me close to you! Close! Close!”

He wrenched at the bars in a burst of wild, sobbing anger at this fate. After all his care for her, after all his thought, that it should end thus! Even her passionate, loving words, the touch of her clasped fingers, could not prevent him from trying to think, from seeking to do something. It was the difference between man

## *THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE*

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and woman—the man who acts by instinct and rebels so fruitlessly and dies so hard!—and the woman so brave in her acceptance of life's exigencies, so satisfied—if in the end she gives! Again the water seemed to gain fresh impetus and rose higher. He was standing on one foot, his other knee upon the sill. The torrent was pouring around their shoulders. Soon it would close out the wild view from the window. The ceiling was low. Ah, God! to think of it! like this! like rats in a sinking cage—and he could do nothing! He heard her voice again. She was praying—praying for his soul and hers—and her children, too—O God, take care of them—and forgive her sins!—a few words he caught. Again now she asked a question: “Are we going to drown?” He could not answer, but lifted her to him and their lips met. And thus he held her, his eyes closed.

He felt a strange sensation, as if something had touched him on the shoulder, and then again upon the elbow. He turned his head and looked at life once more! It was a bit of wood caught by the current and drifting against his body. The flood was going down! . . .

It was wonderful how quickly it subsided. In a moment it was only waist-deep, then to their knees, and then it but lapped the window sill and was slowly sinking.

“Amy! Amy!” he cried. “We’re saved! we’re saved!” She opened her eyes slowly, as if she had been asleep, drew a long breath, gasped, and her head fell back. He called her name, kissing again and again her lips, her brow, her eyes; but now she did not reply or move.

Her limp body still clung against him, and every

## THE END OF SILENCE

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moment, inch by inch, the water lowered. Out of the window the valley looked like a muddy roadbed after a cloud-burst. The old wooden bridge was gone! nothing but the stone abutments showed. The water hardly covered the concrete flooring. He carried her to the door. He could open it a foot or so. In front yawned the cavernous black shape of the iron tower. The dam, except at the edges, was completely swept away!

It was with difficulty that he squeezed himself with his burden out into the air; staggering and plunging through the mud and *débris* he made for the bank and struggled up it to the road. Just as he reached it, Amy stirred in his arms. He heard her speak his name and, stooping, placed her on the dry, dusty grass, crouching beside her. She lay against him, her head on his breast, drawing weak breaths. He put his face to hers, his arms about her shoulders, crushing her to him as if his contact could bring warmth to her.

Now she spoke. "O Larry! Larry!" she murmured, "so we've got to live."

"Yes, live! live" he repeated, lips to her ear. "Live for each other. God has brought it about so. We've seen the way. . . . Nothing will part us, now—Life is before us! O my beloved!"

She shook her head. "No, no," she said. "No, no," and yet she did not draw back from him; in fact, drew closer as she spoke.

They seemed to have forgotten poor Timms lying up the road near the spring on the opposite bank. They seemed to be the only two left on the earth—as if all others had been swept away by the raging yellow waters.



## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

"Don't you see, heart of mine," he went on, "it has been all ordained—nothing else counts. What is the world to us? I will hold you—never let you go!"

"No, no," she repeated feebly; "we cannot—we must be strong again. God help us to be strong." And still praying for strength herself, she reached up and bore his face down to hers. "The last time," she faltered.

"Never the last time," he cried, "never the last time! Do you think I will let you go? Let us dare everything! Hear me— Listen to me!"

"Larry"—she drew away weakly, grasping his detaining hands—"we must not! O dearest—dearest—don't make it too hard for me. Don't—don't!"

"I want to make it easier," he rebelled. "I want to have you forget all that has gone—we can forget together; we must not deny ourselves—to our best selves—we must be——"

"No, Larry." She held him off, her eyes looking deep into his. "Help me, as you came to me just now when most I needed you. Help me, dear! If it was only I myself! But there are other lives—I've vowed to think of them—I never could forget! O strong man I love, help me to be strong again!" She was sobbing in pleading half-helpless breaths.

He bent to kiss her. She placed her fingers against his lips.

"Don't, don't, I pray of you. There, give me your hand—help me up. . . . Oh! please—please, don't."

She rose to her knees, and then struggled to her feet, her wet skirts clinging, her fingers linked in his that drew her to him.

## THE END OF SILENCE

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A bent figure lurched down into the road and staggered back on seeing them.

"Ah, look! there's Timms!" she cried.

"Oh, praise God!" the man gasped weakly. "You're not killed. I feared you both were drowned here below. Did you get word to 'em?"

"Yes—they got word," said Lawrence hoarsely, dropping Amy's hands, but still supporting her. "Sit down, Timms—you're too badly hurt!"

"My ribs is stove in—but I heard a wagon coming, sir! I hear it now!"

Round the corner, shrouded in the alder bushes, came a white-topped butcher wagon, a man in a long apron driving. He pulled up in astonishment at the sight of the devastation and the group in the road before him, gasping, stricken, absolutely dumb!

He gazed from the constable, holding on to the bushes for support, to Lawrence's soaked figure and Amy's, who were approaching him. Lawrence spoke first.

"The dam was blown up! This man is injured. You must drive us to the village. Hold on, Timms, man. Don't try to stand! . . . Here, you get out and help me."

The man in the apron descended to the ground.

"I want to know! I want to know!" he kept repeating in a dazed, stupid way. "I heard the 'xplosion—thout they was blastin'— God! Constable, you're hurted, ain't ye?"

The wagon was empty. Lawrence spread the horse blanket on the floor and with the driver's help lifted the wounded man. Timms never groaned.

"You're mighty good, sir," he mumbled. "Christ

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

be thanked, you got 'em in time at the mill. Oh, some o' them Dagos'll go to jail for this! The low-lived, murderin', damned— Pardon me, ma'am——”

Amy was reaching in, arranging the blanket. The driver, standing at the tailboard, found his tongue.

“I was wonderin' why they was blastin' on Sunday. I heard it far back on the road— Lordy! they played hell!— Look, sir!” He had interrupted himself, pointing out at the valley. “See them yonder! They're clearin' out, and they've set fire to the camp. Yes, sir! See the smoke?”

Figures carrying bundles slung across their backs were hurrying away from the direction of Brimfield, heading for the line of the other railroad about twelve miles off.

Lawrence glanced hastily across at the retreating forces—truly, labor troubles had resolved themselves into warfare!

“You've got to take this lady and me along with you,” he said, turning to the driver. “And we've got to get this poor fellow to where he can be taken care of. Don't stand there gaping—pick up those reins.”

“All right, sir; you and her get up in front. I'll make out.”

As Lawrence helped Amy to the seat their hands met—her fingers were icy cold, her face colorless. He clambered up and sat beside her. The man in the apron huddled himself on the footboard.

“Don't spare the whip; there's a good road ahead!”

The old horse started at a gallop, heaving up and down in the harness, back and legs protesting. The wagon rattled, and the swinging scales behind jangled as they went down the hill.

## *THE END OF SILENCE*

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Amy was holding on to the supports of the canvas top. Lawrence put his arms around her to keep her in. Since the arrival of the wagon they had not exchanged a word. She did not turn to look at his hard-set face that watched hers so intently. They were leaving the Great Half of their lives back there at the curve of the road—not the dead past: the great half that would live forever!

They had reached the end of the incline and had come to heavy going. The old horse refused to move at a faster pace than a shambling walk, despite lashings and much clucking. The voice of the wounded man lying back in the blanket suddenly attracted Lawrence's attention. He turned and looked over his shoulder.

"We're getting on, Timms. We'll soon be there."

The constable, who was made of soldier stuff, responded bravely.

"I'm doing fine— Too bad you lost your dog, sir!"

He had forgotten all about him! Poor, plucky little Robin Adair would chase no more squirrels. He had followed his master to the power house and, finding the door shut on him, had gone around to the other side to investigate and had been swept away in the flood—poor Robin Adair!

In his present mood Larry almost envied him. Oh, the cursed circumstance that had ruined the past and surrounded and clutched the future! It was to go on again in the old, hopeless way—he could see that—the old hopeless way! He looked at Amy. Her lips were white; she was shivering slightly, but her head was turned from him. His whole being seemed to rise in rebellion— No, he would not permit it! He'd fight

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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it—win—over all the circumstances in the world. He could never let her go! He would see her, he would continue to see her; besiege her until she gave in. Nothing would matter—nothing!

Involuntarily he had drawn her closer; she did not respond. Her eyes were straight ahead, as if she had turned from the sunset to the afterglow and was looking far beyond that to the dawn of a dull, dreary coming day. The past was gone, the present did not exist; it was the future that she saw—the hopeless, endless future!

What had happened down in the valley in consequence of the flood they could not tell; they had met no one and had passed no houses. On the opposite side they could see some people moving and standing about, looking at the wreck and the destruction wrought by the mighty rush of water. But when they had gained the top of the slight hill they could see where the road turned off to cross the old wooden bridge to the left. There was a small brown frame house here and a man and a woman were standing at the gate. The man was pointing and the woman, her hands rolled in her apron, was following the direction of the gesture. They looked in astonishment at the butcher's wagon as it drove past with its strange load. And now from the direction of the village they could see some people nearing, headed by two men trundling bicycles. Lawrence could feel Amy trembling against him. She turned her head and their eyes met—only for an instant. Once more he clasped her cold fingers. This time they replied convulsively.

“Stop here, at the corner of the lane,” she said, controlling her voice. “I can go home on foot.”

## THE END OF SILENCE

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"No, no," he said, "we'll drive you there."

"It will take longer," she replied. Leaning forward she spoke to the driver, who pulled in the tired horse. "You have Timms to look after," she went on, still avoiding his glance. "He lives in the third house, the little unpainted one beyond the next road crossing. I'm strong enough, I can walk home—it will warm me."

The approaching men were less than a quarter of a mile away. Jumping to the ground, Lawrence took my's cold hands in his; then, half lifting her in his arms, he assisted her slowly to alight. Never, never could he forget the look on her face as her eyes met his own.

"But I will see you," he whispered hoarsely. "I must—to-night, to-morrow. . . . Tell me I may see you."

She looked at him without replying, as if she had not heard.

"Find Judge Hollins," she said at last; "send him to me as soon as he can come." And then almost breathlessly she repeated his name over and over: "Larry, Larry!" Suddenly she withdrew the hand that he had still been holding and stepped past him, hastening up the bushy lane.

## CHAPTER XV

### ASHES OF HOPE

**T**HE streets were strangely deserted; here and there a few women were standing, talking over fence and hedge. Almost everyone had gone to the river bank, or to the iron bridge, below which the flood from the brook valley had swept into the stream. But as Lawrence turned the corner near the Soldiers' Monument, he saw a group listening to the story that a man in muddy rubber boots was telling. He was stepping back from the others, as if measuring a distance to emphasize a point in his narration. Lawrence recognized him: Mr. "Bill" Gould, the newly elected sheriff. He thought for an instant that one of the listeners called to him, but he crossed the street on purpose to avoid them and hurried on.

In a few minutes he had reached his own gate and cut across the lawn to the entrance of the big white house. The faithful Mary met him in the hallway.

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence," she cried—Mary Dimock had known him since boyhood—"they've been callin' you and callin' you, sir, on the telephone—Judge Hollins, I think it was."

"From where, Mary?" Lawrence asked, pausing at the door of his room.

## ASHES OF HOPE

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"From Deemer's—the little saloon place the far side of the wooden bridge."

"Was there any message left?"

"No, sir—and later they called you up from 'The Hill,' I think it was. It was a great flood they had in the valley, sir, and a blessing that none of the poor folks below was not drowned! Margaret was down in the village to church and came home to tell me of it."

He did not wait to hear any more. Sending her to get whisky and hot water ready, he quickly changed his clothes. A few minutes later he entered the library; a bright fire was burning there, and, after pouring out a strong brew, he dropped wearily into the big arm-chair.

The happenings of the afternoon had been so unreal, so sudden in the succession of climaxes, that as yet he had had no time to reason over them. But what was Amy doing there? What had brought her to that place at that hour? There had been no explanations. The incidents remained in his mind as a confused jumble of events, out of which rose the one dominant idea that life and death, too, had cheated him. The reprieve had been followed by more torture. That was all! He could look forward to no certainty. Where would it end now? He was still in a state of rebellion. He knew the strength of Amy's will and back of the pathetic repetition of his name at their strange parting he had read again her determination. He marveled at her strength! A hatred for convention, for written laws and social rules grew fiercely within him. A mad hatred for the miserable, worthless creature, the cause of all! To think of it! She still linked by her sense of right, her vows, to the robber who had wrecked their lives!



## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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Yet it was not her fear of transgressing mere convention that held her back; she was bigger, braver than that! It was this: she would meet the indorsement that she had been tricked into giving, as if pledged in all honor to redeem it with her life; because she could not face living otherwise! She had faced death bravely enough! God! could he ever forget the touch of her hands and lips, the words she had spoken? How much more greatly did women feel great moments! How proudly, grandly, freely they gave all! And there came to him the murmured prayer he had overheard, "God take care of her children and forgive her sins." Her sins! The whitest soul that ever gleamed in the sunlight! How she had kept her faith in Heaven he could not understand. How could a just and all-wise God permit such things to be?

He could hear Mary, and her daughter Margaret, the maid of all work, setting the table in the dining room. He felt too tired, almost, to rise as he caught the sound of wheels outside the window. Then he heard voices and recognized Judge Hollins's, giving directions to have his horse put up in the shed and blanketed. In another moment he had come into the room, followed by Mary, who lit the lamp.

"Been away all day?" asked the judge as Lawrence stood to greet him.

"Yes; but I returned some time ago."

"Then you know what's happened."

"Yes, I saw some of it." He wondered at his own lack of interest. It seemed difficult for him to concentrate his mind. The old gentleman walked over to the table where Mary had placed the whisky and hot water. Lawrence motioned an invitation.

## ASHES OF HOPE

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"Pretty awful, eh?" muttered the judge, as he poured himself out a drink and stood there holding it, untasted, in his fingers.

"Yes; rather fortunate that it didn't do more damage."

The judge started and looked at him curiously.

"Well, perhaps—my stars! That's a strange way o' put it!" he began; then he branched off. "They tried to find you here and then called me up to see if I knew of your whereabouts—and they were looking for Jubilee; but he was off somewhere. That's the way I heard of it. Lord! I tell you it was awful, awful! When I got there, of course, I saw that nothing could be done; but I shall never forget the sight—never! never! never! Poor thing! she lay there in that dingy, reeking hole of a barroom——"

Lawrence roused himself. "What are you talking about?" he said. "I don't understand."

"Man! didn't you hear?" exclaimed the judge, starting in consternation. "Mrs. Rice was drowned—killed, at least—there at the old wooden bridge. She was crossing it in her car when the flood caught her. She was pinned down under the wreck in the water."

Lawrence swayed. "Was she alone?" he asked hoarsely. "I hadn't heard of this."

"Only her chauffeur—he escaped somehow and got some people from Deemer's to help him; but it was too late. Poor Katherine!"

"You're sure she was alone?"

"Oh, yes; I talked with her man. He said they had just dropped somebody across on the other side on the Antioch road. I wonder if it could have been that

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

skunk Bellwood! But no, I suppose he'd be— What's the matter, Lawrence?"

"Nothing, judge. Don't let's stand. Sit down here; tell me the rest."

He had sunk down, himself, into the big armchair and lowered his head in his hand. Yes! yes! it was true— He had hoped—hoped!

The judge drew up a chair and his voice softened. "Why, Larry! my boy! I didn't know that you'd take it so hard. I had no idea—in fact, I thought——"

The old gentleman had lost his bearings, but Lawrence's next words put him on his course again.

"Oh, don't let me lead you into any unconscious error, judge. It isn't that. You'll understand it later when I begin to tell you what happened with me. . . . But it will wait. Please go on. You said they brought her to Deemer's."

The judge continued with the story.

Poor Mrs. Ned! Truly it had come unawares! She had little time to fear, little time to prepare, and little time to suffer. . . . It seemed that something had gone wrong with the engine halfway across the bridge, and the man had descended from the car to straighten out the machinery, when the flood caught them. The big car now lay in the muddy bed grooved by the current. It was that that the man at the little brown farmhouse had been pointing out to his wife when the wagon had driven past that afternoon.

As he listened Lawrence found it hard to realize that the recital was one of actual occurrence! Only a few short hours ago he had been talking to Mrs. Rice at the Country Club—she so full of health, ever spurning the thought of responsibility and of the two inevitable

## ASHES OF HOPE

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things in life—old age and death. Yet the misery of the story was swamped absolutely by the living tragedy of his own. His personal experience had benumbed his appreciation. As the judge had gone on with the details it was evident that not only his feelings had been aroused—the responsibility of any action had devolved upon him. He had attended to all the necessary matters, telegraphing to the daughter and to her father's relations in Troy, sending for Mrs. Rice's legal representative in the city, even wiring to some distant relations of hers—for she had no immediate family—in California. During the whole of the telling Lawrence had not made a single interruption. The judge had glanced at him more than once, in doubt as to whether he was still listening. His silence, under the circumstances, especially when it came to Dr. Porter's belated verdict, for the homeopath was the only one who had been called into the case, so far, was strange.

“And now,” said the judge, as he ended, “I have told you all there is to tell. . . . I don't wish to go through another such a day. Man! if you could have seen her lying there, so changed, so—you see one of the big wooden beams—it was horrible, horrible! And the grief of her servants, and that poor incoherent Frenchman, sobbing like a great, mustached baby. How is it the verse goes? ‘Ye know neither the time nor the hour’—something like that, isn't it? How the Bible does hit things off in that way! The directness of legal phraseology holds nothing in comparison. . . . But”—and he changed his manner suddenly—“it is my turn to be a listener. Tell me of the day with you. Where were you? What have you been doing?”

Lawrence drew a long breath. How should he be-

## **THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE**

gin? His utter weariness of body, and the reaction from the sensations of those soul-searing moments, when he and the woman he loved had looked together at the face of sure-approaching death, left him mentally uncertain. He could not gain the starting point. He felt like a person in a dream who finds difficulty in keeping afoot along what might seem to be a plain unbroken road. He was afraid of lurching into some by-path from which he could not disentangle himself. He could diagnose his own case clearly—brain numbness—but he could think of no prescription that might suit the exigency; the strong fumes of the whisky only seemed to deaden him. The judge began leading him as a lawyer might deftly lead a client who was overcome, or partly stultified, by the formidableness of his expected testimony.

“You went for a long walk this morning? Where did you go, Larry?”

“I went to the Country Club—walked across the hills.”

“It was a long walk. What time did you get there?”

“About luncheon time.”

“See anyone you knew?”

“Yes. Dr. Smith and Mrs. Rice and Murger, who were lunching there.”

“Oh, then, it was he who was with her.”

“No. It was not he; it was some one else.”

“Frank Bellwood?”

“I am not certain—maybe so. There was some mystery about it. Yes, I think it was.”

So it went on until at last it seemed that the judge's kindly questions had stirred him to the point of telling

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without effort what had happened. Though he spoke quietly and calmly, the effect upon his hearer was remarkable. The judge was seated on the very edge of his chair, a large hand on each knee. He rocked back and forth slowly, and when he asked a question he did so soothingly, with a great effort to conceal the intensity of his interest. Unknown to Lawrence, who sat looking into the fire, Mary had appeared, entering hastily from the dining room. The judge had waved her off with a gesture that partly implored her and partly drove her, tiptoeing, into the kitchen. Lawrence was telling of seeing Amy and her rescue of Timms from the hands of the would-be murderers.

"Just like her," murmured the judge. "No soldier that ever lived faced dangers or rose to an emergency the way some women have."

Inch by inch, word by word now, he got the story and read between the lines. Lawrence was inclined to hasten over the time when the rush of water had closed the door of the power house, but the judge held him.

"There was no way out, nothing for you to do?"

"Nothing for us to do."

"Was she frightened?"

"God, no! Frightened! She——"

There was silence. The first thing he knew the judge's hand was on his shoulder.

"I'm glad," he said, "glad to be alive in a world where some people live; and mind you, Larry—I suppose I'm a fatalist—things are ordained to happen. I am not a religious man, but there must be——"

He stopped. Lawrence could feel his fingers moving, half caressing, full of intent to comfort. He turned

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for almost the first time and looked his old friend in the face. The judge's eyes and cheeks were wet.

Talking with a true friend is thinking out loud, and suddenly Lawrence realized how much of his own thought he must have shown—how much he must have said. But sagely the judge had made no comment; he went on with his questioning, his voice mellifluous.

“And so you got out and found Timms on the bank again?”

“Yes, and a wagon happening to pass—a butcher's cart, at least—we put Timms into it and drove him home. I did the best I could for him. Amy had left at the corner of the lane that leads back of the rectory. We had just got poor Timms into his house when I saw old Rublee and Ellery Slocum driving by and called them in. Rublee packed me off—I told him to call at the rectory.”

The judge grunted. “Ellery'll be waiting up at the hotel to tell me all about it, I suppose. Did he see Amy?”

“No; she'd left me some time before, I told you.”

The mention of her name seemed to set Lawrence off in another reverie, in which after a few minutes he thought aloud again.

“What was she doing there, I'd like to know,” he half asked.

“That puzzles me,” rejoined the judge; “unless perhaps”—he chuckled in an endeavor to lighten the key of the talk—“it was to escape a visit from the Reverend Remsen Bache. I went by the rectory this afternoon about five, just after church was out, and saw him sitting on the veranda, as if waiting for somebody to return. Maybe she'd gone out for a walk; nobody

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seemed to be at home, and the children, I know, were down at Mrs. Winter's."

Strange truths are often guessed at, or arrived at semihumorously. Entirely unknown to himself, and never to be substantiated by any evidence, direct or otherwise, the judge had hit upon the explanation when he referred to Mr. Bache. Amy had stayed at the lonely house, braving her troubles out alone, for she had not attended either service; but late in the afternoon, upon seeing who it was at the rectory gate, she had made her escape to the lane, and, finding that the exercise and the fresh air cleared her mind, she had continued up the unfrequented road until she had arrived at the dam, just in time to see the onslaught on the constable.

Minutes had meant so much to her that day. If she had left the house but a little later she might have met her husband returning—hangdog, up the lane. Still later, she would have seen the sight of the rushing water, the destruction of the bridge, and, left amidst the piled-up *débris*, the red sides and flashing bright work of poor Mrs. Rice's auto car.

"Oh, I nearly forgot something, judge." Lawrence turned, breaking the silence, and laid his hand on his friend's arm. "She wants you to come and see her—as soon as you can. It was about the last thing she said to me. You'll go to-night?"

"Yes, I'll hurry down there. . . . Mary came to the door a moment ago. I smell a steak, too."

"Won't you stay, sir?"

"No; I had something at the hotel. I will be off. See you surely in the morning. Come to my office, won't you? I had an engagement—guess I can get out of



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it; any rate I've the afternoon free. Now, let me tell you what is my firm belief: Everything in all this is going to—" He had begun cheerfully enough, but could not finish it out; his tone changed: "D'ye know—there is something fundamentally wrong with laws and life, Larry; things seem all built askew so often. Why the devil that worthless, miserable, incumbrance on the earth wasn't drowned I don't— No; of course, I don't mean that, exactly— If it *had* occurred under the circumstances it would have made such a nasty scandal and—and, Lord knows, Amy's had enough to bear. She ought to leave him—only *you* know and *I* know, she wouldn't take that step! There are only two insurmountable things in the world—a prejudice and a will! But"—the judge tried to end up in a less bitter strain—"it may all work out. Don't let's haul down our flag. Now I must leave you, Larry. Go eat something. . . . Don't come with me, your man's just outside; he'll get my horse."

The old lawyer hastened out into the hall. Lawrence heard the quiet closing of the back door; he knew that the judge had perceived that he had rather be left alone. A sentence he remembered reading, or hearing in a play, kept recurring to him: "If only love were all!" Why shouldn't it be all!

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE KEY OF CHANCE

**I**T was past midnight, but Amy had not gone to bed. It relieved her to be doing something, and she was slowly and methodically packing things into the big trunk in the corner of her room, wrapping up articles separately with great care, as if there was a long journey ahead of her. Once she had stopped and had gone to the door. No, there was no sound from her husband's room across the hall. She tiptoed over the worn carpet and listened. She could hear his low breathing. Dr. Rublee had told her he would probably sleep through the night and would be stronger in the morning. Whether he would be able to get up or not he could not tell. She came back to her room again. The open door of the deep wardrobe showed rows of empty hooks; she looked slowly about her and caught a reflection of her face in the mirror. . . . Did she look like that? No wonder that Judge Hollins had started at sight of her. It frightened her—her own face! It was like a colorless, hollow-eyed mask. Even her eyes looked pallid, and they stared back at her so lifelessly.

She could not stand it! She tilted the glass so it caught no reflection but the ceiling. But even there was her shadow, monstrous, hanging over her like some

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figure of black care—always to follow her. She put both hands to her eyes, as if to shut things out, and sank down on the floor against the bed; motionless she remained there, scarcely breathing. Then she lowered her hands slowly and they fell to her knees—palms upward in a gesture of complete helplessness. Her face did not change, her head did not move from where it lay back against the coverlid. Her mind was working strangely.

Yes; that was the trunk she had had with her when she had made that journey to Europe; there were all the tags and posters. She had just put her hair up and looked older than she really was, and Sally Porter, the girl she had traveled with, had married an Englishman in the diplomatic service and then got a divorce and married a rich mining man from Nevada, or somewhere; but she had no children. And she, Amy Winter, had married a—the man in the room across the hall, and she had two children—and——

She roused herself and, half crawling over the rug, took up her packing. When she had finished there was nothing left out but the gown she would wear the next day, and the things she would need in the morning. Then without a glance around her she turned out the light and threw herself limply on the bed.

Had anyone ever lived through such a day before? She wondered that she could think about it. Nevertheless things had succeeded one another until they were at least definite and clear. If they had not been, she felt that she certainly would have broken; the pains in her head and over her eyes, the sensation of the tightly drawn wire through her brain would have been too much to bear, something would have snapped! But she must

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keep up her courage, keep up her strength to do what she had to do on the morrow.

She had won part of her fight, and one haunting suspicion had been lulled. As to what had happened at the power house—she did not wish to blot that out! The memory of every moment was dear to her. But God had preserved her life for some purpose—she would meet the purpose face to face.

Frank was going with her. As soon as she had changed her things, upon returning to the house, she had found him in his room—in a state of collapse! At first she could not understand his broken sentences. He had spoken of being saved “a second time.” He had knelt at her knees and implored her forgiveness, begged her not to leave him, mingling with his words prayers of thanks to the God he had served so ill, and prayers for help! Abject, terror-stricken, cowed by remorse and fear, he clutched his hands and beat his head. He would go anywhere!—they might lock him up!—only let him have time to show his repentance. Then he would be glad to die and leave her free!

She had quieted him by the time the doctor came. But the old physician had looked at him gravely as he lay on the bed exhausted. He had rallied under the stimulant, however, and passed the crisis, as he had done before.

Then the doctor had turned his attention to Amy. But she met his emphatic advice, his orders, with assurances of her continued strength, not knowing that this strength was merely nerves and will. She asked about Timms, as soon as she had found out he had seen Lawrence, and he had given her the shortest but most cheerful of answers, and commanded her to go to bed.

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She shook her head at him. Would her husband be able to take the train in the morning? He didn't know—couldn't tell until he'd seen him. . . . Yes; Peyton's Sanitarium, that was the name—on the lake, a few miles from Antioch. Of course he'd call up Dr. Smith and have him arrange things; but she must go to bed—"take this draught and go to bed!"

With that he left her. But she did not obey. She was past fatigue! She had gone to her room and lain down for a few moments, only to rise suddenly and call the maid, who met her at the door bearing some tea on a tray. She had looked at her mistress frightened.

"Have the children come home?" Amy asked.

Yes, they were down having their supper. Ellen would look after them. . . . "Missus had better rest." Nothing would do, however, but she must go and sit with them. But before she went downstairs she turned. Would the maid get the trunks from the attic—she described them both minutely—and put one at the end of the hall and the other in her bedroom?

She was like the captain of a ship, who, battling for hours through heart-breaking dangers with his vessel on the shoals, unresting, still had the strength and judgment to take advantage of a lull and get away his boats—forgetting nothing.

Ellen had looked at her in alarm as she entered the dining room, and had fled to the kitchen; it was a full minute before she returned; then she could not control her tongue.

"Mrs. Bellwood, ma'am—you'll be after killing yourself," she half wept. "I heard what the doctor said. Why don't you be sensible? What's come over this house, anyway!"

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Amy had silenced her with a gesture, and took her seat; she asked the children of the day at their grandmother's; how would they like to go there and spend a longer time? Would they be good and obey Ellen, if she would go with them, too?

The little ones saw something was wrong; they exchanged glances. But Amy persevered, and they at last seemed to forget. She led them upstairs and put them to bed as usual, hearing their prayers.

"Your lips are awful cold, mummy," said little Amy, as she put up her face for the good-night kiss. The boy would not let go of her fingers. "Please go—get warm," he kept repeating. She half promised, and left them, but remained standing outside the door after softly closing it. Yes! if it were not for them—those anchors to her duty—she might be tempted to let go and drift!

Ellen and Sarah, the maid, soon came up to see her—was there anything they could do? No; she would pack things up alone; she knew where everything was; Mr. Bellwood and she were going away for some time. Ellen would go to Meadow Farm with the children and Sarah would stay and look after the rectory, and take care of Mr. Bache—he would probably be there for some weeks. Now she "had some letters to write"; she ordered them off, kindly but firmly. They left, but stood whispering together on the back stairs. She could hear their soft Irish sibilants of commiseration, and closed the door of the hall. They knew of the catastrophe at the wooden bridge. It was Ellen who had told Bellwood of it while Amy was changing her clothes. As Ellen had put it, the minister "had taken on strangely." But Amy did not know.

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Seating herself at the little desk in her bedroom she began her letter writing. The first addressed to the vestry and Mr. Lewis, senior warden of St. John's, tendering Frank's resignation. It was impossible, "in his state of health," to continue. She had begun one to the Rev. Remsen Bache, when she heard knocking at the front door, and soon voices from below. Ellen was protesting that her mistress had gone to bed.

Amy hurried to the top of the stairway.

"Is that Judge Hollins?" she asked.

The judge himself replied.

"I'm here—but don't come down; I'll come early in the morning."

"No; I must see you to-night."

She descended the stairs, and it was then that the judge had started at seeing her.

"You're in no condition to talk now," he averred. "You're worn out—utterly used up—I really just called to ask how you were; but there's no need of asking! Now, like a sensible child, go and turn in. I vow I won't talk to you!"

"But you will." She summoned a wan smile. "Come in here, judge. . . . Ellen, light the lamp in the study."

"I shall do no such thing, ma'am," responded the old servant stoutly, when she saw that she had gained so important an ally. "She come home, sir, wet as a rag—and just look at her! fit for her own wake and no less—and tending to Mr. Bellwood, who had one of his turns, and packing his things and her own, and never touching a morsel. She's like a— There—look now! Sure there's no reasoning at all with her!"

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Amy had gone into the study and lit the lamp herself.

"Ellen, stop scolding. There is no use in your waiting; Judge Hollins and I have to talk; it's hardly nine o'clock. Please come in, judge."

The old lawyer entered, and Ellen, utterly routed, went back to Sarah in the kitchen.

"I want you to tell me something." She was still standing looking at him with her pale tired eyes. He was spinning his hat in both hands like a discomfited schoolboy.

"Well, Amy, I think——"

"No; I don't want you to think. I just want to ask you something."

"Go on, my dear."

"Did Lawrence buy that mining stock from you?"

"Well, bless my soul! what put that idea in your head? Of all—! Really, Amy, child, you'd——"

"Did he?"

"Amy Winter, I always thought you the most sensible——"

"But did he?"

"No. Of course not, if you really want me to answer such a question! But, my stars! Well, well, well!"

"You're sure of it? sure? sure?"

In a flash he had seen it! What an innocent, gullible, blind old ass he had been! What must Lawrence have thought of his power of perception? It was all as plain as the simplest brief he had ever written—plainer! What a dull, lump-headed old fool! But it is a part of a lawyer's calling to dissemble—at least to cover his surprise. Judge Horton L. Hollins, whose



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word was as good as his bond, whose statement was as good as most men's affidavits, began to lie; simply, magnificently, grandly, to lie. Not too glibly, but with finesse worthy of Leoperello himself! He was hurt, not only hurt, but politely outraged at the suspicion of his connivance in any such deception! Pho! Why, Lawrence had never heard of "El Cintura Mining Stock." Didn't know whether it was coal or diamonds, whether it was in Pennsylvania or South Africa. He had warned him against asking too much for fear of losing the opportunity and scaring off the purchaser. The judge winced a little as he made this statement. That there was such a person as Louis A. Gunsberg had been news to him. He *had* heard of Kahn, Davis & Co.; but who hadn't? . . . "Amy, Amy, you poor child; you're sick for sense!" No, he didn't mean that! but the events of the day had probably upset her so that she was an easy victim to strange ideas and imaginings. He returned to his former advice about her resting, and then suddenly asked her plans. Yes, that was the proper course—"Peyton's Sanitarium"; they knew what to do there; and, if necessary, he'd go with her and Frank. No one need know where they had taken him. They had started the right way now; everything would work out. And then he came back to his advice about sleep and rest again, and under cover of that, had beat his retreat.

As he had gone on with his astute denials, the judge had felt rejoiced and rewarded; he noticed more life come into her face, her tension seemed to lessen, and she looked less white and ghostlike as he bade good-by to her at the door—with a final injunction.

But when once out of sight of the house, on the

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dark street, he leaned against a tree box and silently arraigned himself in a manner that would have been shocking to have heard.

He ought to be locked up for life, "hung up in a tree for the birds to peck at"—and so on to no end. Now Mr. Gunsberg's strange smile was accounted for! And Lawrence! The only thing to do there was to make a clean breast of it. . . . But, how well, how cleverly, he had dissembled! that was one comfort. He couldn't be such a helpless old imbecile after all!

"I wonder if anyone has ever written a work on 'Scientific Prevarication,'" said the judge to himself, as he walked on again. "Good subject; one axiom would be: 'A slow brain maketh a bold lie.'" He addressed an imaginary Lawrence: "But, Larry, my boy, my boy! what must you have thought of me? cackling away like an idiot, and reaching down into your pocket—when you had already been so generous!"

Amy, before utter exhaustion had closed her eyes, felt, growing out of her desolation, this one thought—that something had been saved. There was the last chance left—and she held the only key.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE TRYING OF THE WAYS

**W**HEN the train had disappeared round the curve, the judge stood for a moment on the station platform wiping his eyeglasses. Another chapter in the story had ended or begun, he could not tell which; but whether it was the ending or the beginning it had left him in a most depressed state of mind. The future was perplexing, and his part in it would have to be that of a mere looker-on. Circumstances had bound his hands in the matter; he could neither lead nor suggest. As to advice, that also was beyond him; he would not know what to advise. Things would have to take their way.

He had reconsidered his decision of the night before, about making a clean breast of his stupidity to Lawrence. He felt not a little angry, during his first mental summing up, that the latter had not told him the whole plan. He might have known that he could have counted on his coöperation. But his sense of justice—and, oddly, his sense of humor, too—told him that his own excited enthusiasm had blinded him. One thing more, also, he was forced to acknowledge. If he had been prepared for Amy's sudden question, she would have found him out! He had simply translated his surprise at his own denseness into surprise at her suspicions,

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and in the stress of the moment discovered in his own resources unsuspected depths of subterfuge. Now he stood committed; it made no matter which way it had come about.

"Morning, judge."

He replaced his glasses and then gazed over the rims. It was young Tom Lewis, son of the senior warden of St. John's, the usual cigarette hanging from his lips.

"Morning, Tom; you're out early to-day."

"Yep, rather; got to meet a feller, comin' in on the next train. You remember him, always stops at the hotel—Eb. Colson? Travels for Hirsch Brothers—general millinery and feather goods—writes sometimes for the papers."

Mr. Lewis's cigarette beat a staccato time to his words, for both hands were in his pockets.

"No, I don't think I have the honor of his acquaintance."

The judge was starting off. Young Tom caught him by his coat sleeve.

"Mr. Bellwood's a pretty sick man, ain't he?"

"He hasn't been well for a long time; he is going away now for a rest."

"Looked kinder dotty to me; old Rublee going with him?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Mrs. Bellwood's goin', I suppose; she looked as if she needed it, too—kinder worried like."

"Think so? Perhaps she has been worried."

"Seen the *Gazette* this morning, judge?"

"Yes—I've a copy. Good morning to you, Tom. Here comes the train."

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This time the judge broke free and, taking the long step down from the end of the baggage platform, in order to avoid passing the station, headed for his office.

When he had opened his desk, he took off his cuffs, placed them in one of the pigeonholes, then hung up his big gold watch on the little hook and wiped his glasses carefully. Every day for over thirty years he had gone through the same performance, but now, instead of reaching amid the jumble of papers to begin his morning labor, he sat there teetering back and forth in the squeaky old spring chair.

It was thus that Lawrence Kellogg found him and shattered his brooding with welcome suddenness.

"They told me at the hotel that you had gone to the station, judge," he said quietly, taking the proffered hand. "I feared that you might have been called away to Kenton Falls."

"No, Larry; I just went to the station to see 'em off." The judge remarked his calmness with grateful but well-concealed surprise. "You know Amy and Frank went this morning, with old Rublee. D'ye know, there's a lot of good stuff and horse sense left in that old cuss, and he's let up on the tipping lately. They are going to take 'the incumbrance' to Peyton's—my stars! he looked a dreadful wreck. Lord, Lord, what a tragedy!"

"How is Amy, judge?" Lawrence's tones were even; only the intensity of his gaze gave to the words the weight of deep care. After the spiritual upheaval, the waters of his judgment had settled, as the sea might over a sunken volcano, leaving no trace but the floating ashes.

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“ Well, if anything, she looked worse than Bellwood did. I won’t deceive you, Larry, boy, she looked like death; but she holds on just like it, too. She’ll go to the end.”

“ What end? Yes, my God, what end? ”

The tones, the words, held bitterness unspeakable.

The judge reflected, rocking back and forth. “ I’ll tell you something,” he said slowly, at last. “ I had a talk with Rublee last night; he says Bellwood won’t last much longer. Another strain of any kind would take him; that’s certain. And he’ll never be cured, either. He hardly knew anything this morning ”—the judge touched his head—“ just about gone. . . . You’re still going abroad, are you? Haven’t changed your mind? ”

“ My passage is engaged on Thursday’s steamer for Southampton.”

“ Well, I think you’d better go, Larry—for a time.”

“ There’s nothing here to keep me. I can’t help in any way. I’ve thought it all out—fought it all out. There’s no use staying.”

“ No; and I think she’d come back if you weren’t here. She can’t stop long out at that place and she’d be better down at Meadow Farm with her mother and the children.”

“ Did she—did she ask anything about me? ”

“ This morning? No.”

“ But last evening? ”

“ Yes.” The judge swung round and fronted him. “ She asked me if you had paid for that ‘ El Cintura ’ stock.”

His eyes took in the swift change in Lawrence’s set face.

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“And you told her?”

“That you’d never heard of it, but was afraid I was trying to squeeze too much out of old Gunsberg; that you were deadly scared I’d upset the apple cart by my grasping. She was awfully suspicious at first.”

“But—don’t keep me in suspense—when you left her?”

“She was convinced that you had no more to do with it than our friend in the moon. Why, how could you?”

He did not expect an answer, but the two sat there looking at each other without blinking. Then Lawrence extended his hand and his old friend infolded it, his eyes moist behind his glasses.

“Some things are better for no explanation,” he said a little hoarsely. “But it dawned on me that I’d been a blind old bat!” The judge looked at him curiously from under his bushy eyebrows. “You see, I looked at things like a modern; you dated back to King Arthur. If I really told you what I thought of you, I don’t know how you’d take it. We’ll drop it with the assurance that things are all right now.”

“But you are sure, sure?”

“That’s what she asked me—what she wanted to know. Don’t worry, it’s settled. It is the belief that I told her the truth that is keeping her up now. I was magnificent, masterly, and effective, and I know I’m forgiven in heaven! If not, I’ve paved hell for a good purpose, and I’m as proud as a little boy in long pants.”

A smile came to Lawrence’s drawn lips. He caught his breath. “So that’s over,” he said.

“It’s signed, sealed, delivered, and recorded—thank the Lord! Did you see the *Gazette* this morning? It’s

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got a long, garbled account of the doings at the water-works and of poor Mrs. Ned's death—poor woman, poor woman! But they've given Timms the credit for calling up the Esterbrook Mill, and you and Amy were not mentioned."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

"No, thank me. I went to the printing office and looked things over. . . . Stayed there till four o'clock this morning and helped garble up the account myself—fixed it with Timms, too. He's reporter-proof. Unlucky devil, they did whang him about!"

"Did you write that eulogy of Mrs. Rice?"

"Yes; nothing to be ashamed of, or denied. She'll be missed by the poor and the rich, too, I reckon. 'Let the dead past bury its dead!' . . . Rice's relatives who live in Troy have telegraphed for the 'Stahlmeyer Directing Corporation' of Antioch to take charge of matters—strange names they call things nowadays! They're going to have the funeral to-morrow, here at the old burying ground. Do you know, Amy did not hear of the accident until just before she left the house for the station—strange, eh? She hadn't any idea where Frank had spent the day—doesn't know now."

The judge glanced at Lawrence and fell responsive to the look on his face during the long, silent pause. Then he broke in on both their thoughts: "Oh, by the way, they caught five of those murdering strikers over near the Springs— Glad I'm not prosecuting attorney; I'd have to subpoena you."

"I'll be off before the trial."

"Yes, I guess that's the proper caper; and I'll manage to keep Amy out of it. . . . Now here comes



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a pesky client who's driven in to see me about a claim against the railroad." The judge rose. "I'll be down at your house this afternoon, Larry, and we'll close up any matters that demand attention."

Lawrence picked up his hat and passed the "pesky" one at the door, the judge signaling a farewell with his handkerchief and glasses, held between thumb and forefinger.

After a short visit to the little office on Main Street to see that everything had been properly packed for storing at the house, he walked hastily homeward. But he was not to escape one interruption to his painful thoughts—he met Ellery Slocum face to face!

Ellery was smiling as he held him up, but his countenance changed, mimiclike, to reflect Lawrence's serious expression.

"Well, doctor, we've had some pretty sad goin's-on here, ain't we, last few hours?"

"Yes; things happened very unfortunately and unexpectedly."

"Did you see her?"

"See who?"

"Mrs. Rice; I didn't know, bein' a physician, as to whether you'd gone out to see her."

"No; there was no reason for my going there."

"I suppose not. Jes' didn't know. Her daughter's coming on the afternoon train; several people from New York and Troy an' elsewhere telegraphed for rooms in the hotel. There'll be a big funeral to-morrow afternoon. You'll go, I suppose?"

"Yes, I suppose so—but I must hurry."

"You're goin' to leave town, I hear."

"Yes."

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“Sailin’ abroad?”

Lawrence nodded.

“What steamer?”

Lawrence gave it with a hint of something dangerously near exasperation and stepped past quickly. Later he had occasion to remember part of the conversation, but now as soon as it was over it went out of his mind.

There was some distraction in the multitude of things he had to do at the big house, where Mary and Margaret, assisted by Enoch Walker, the hired man, and the stable boy, were engaged in rolling up carpets, packing boxes and cases full of books and other belongings; his departure was to be as final as he had intended his stay to be lasting. Old Mary’s grief at his going had made her almost sullen; as to Margaret, she was in a mood that verged on tears. The hired man’s feelings had been placated by the gift of the white-faced roan horse, and he was anxious to speed his parting master in order to sell the valuable keep-sake without hurting anybody’s feelings.

Late in the afternoon the work was finished. Lawrence sat in the partly dismantled library alone. He had determined not to go to the hotel, but to spend the last day in his own house. The idea, the temptation, better, came to him not to delay his departure. Why not go on the early train on the morrow instead of waiting until Wednesday? His steamer sailed on Thursday in the afternoon, and he might as well spend the time in New York as in Brimfield. There were only one or two little things he had put off doing, and they would go undone. But after thinking it all over, he decided to adhere to his original plan and remain over

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANC

until Wednesday. And this was the most momentous decision he had ever made in all his life.

The judge, who arrived early, stayed to dinner during which the conversation was desultory, and the subject uppermost in their minds they avoided as if by mutual consent. Afterwards they sat and talked under the old Amandus Kellogg's portrait again—but the stern face of the old gentleman in the stock was hid behind a ghostly drapery of white. It may have pleased him that he was one of the few things to be left out of the intended appraisal.

The house had such an unhappy air of abandonment in its aspect and cast such a gloom over the judge's spirits, that, for the first time in many years when he arrived at the hotel that evening, he stopped at the gallery of circuit champions and surprised the bartender by ordering a stiff nightcap of Medford.

It was while he was standing there at the end of the bar close under the picture of Sam Patch—2.22½ that Dr. Rublee entered and his face lit up with pleasure.

"Caught in the act! Haven't seen you in this place for over ten years, judge!"

"That was just about the time, doctor." The judge seemed to refer to something specific. "I don't know what possessed me to-night. Don't think I'm very well. I'm mighty glad to see you, however!"

"Won't you let me prescribe another?"

"Thanks; no, I'll just sip this. . . . How are things go to-day? Did Dr. Smith meet you?"

"Yes, I was going to see you in the morning. Fine on, Fred, I want a little more water!—but it can be told in a few words: Bellwood was in pretty good shape

## ***THE TRYING OF THE WAYS***

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until just before we got there, when Smith—d'ye know, there's a fine fellow and a darned good surgeon—had to give him a little jab. Everything was all ready. Peyton understood all about the case, you know; Smith had taken care of that, and——”

“What about Amy—Mrs. Bellwood?”

“I'm coming to her. She intended to stop at the boarding house just outside the grounds. But when Peyton saw her he kinder beckoned me one side. ‘Why,’ says he, ‘she needs looking out for much as he does.’ Tell the truth, she looked like a wraith! So the upshot of the whole thing is that he persuaded her to put up at the sanitarium—nice place, fine rooms and all the comforts, and just the thing for her—and I left the two unhappy young people there to try it out. I'm going to drink to the pluckiest little woman I ever met! and I'm going to add—‘Here's hoping!’”

“Here's hoping!” returned Judge Hollins absent-mindedly, and thus they parted.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE LAST DAY

**H**OW Lawrence hated the once cozy library! It seemed to be associated in his mind with long and lonely hours of mental suffering. He had sat there at night so often, unable to work, unable to read, until it seemed to be a cell in a hopeless purgatory. Now it was worse than ever! The furniture had been partly removed, the pictures covered, and the books, what there were left of them, backed with newspapers behind the glass cases. The only cheerful thing was the fire that burned in the brass-knobbed Franklin stove, and he was sitting before it, his feet on the fender, smoking moodily.

It was late Tuesday afternoon, the end of another uncomfortable, almost bitter day. He had not attended St. John's, where the Rev. Remsen Bache had bleated and hawed through the beautiful service; nor had he gone to the cemetery on the hill where the stone mausoleum of the Rice family, a diminutive Greek temple with gothic fretwork and a colonial iron grille, stood in a corner surrounded by suggestively luxuriant pines. The church had been thronged and a large gathering had followed to the burial. Judge Hollins had described the scene to him.

It must have been a strange sight! The curious

## THE LAST DAY

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crowd of idlers that spring from nowhere to grace such occasions; the sincere mourners among the villagers who had received her bounty and her personal aid; the weeping servants, and, to one side, the Troy relatives and the daughter, in decorous black.

“Strange-looking girl, the daughter!” commented the old lawyer. “Nothing of her mother’s good looks or personality—for all the world like her father! Bad complexion, kinder ingrowing face—you know what I mean—bulging forehead, big cheeks, small eyes, little nose; but plenty of determination, and she never shed a tear! She stood ’round with the folks from Troy who looked like a flock of crows—expected ’em to ‘caw’ before they got through with it! But one strange thing: there were three or four fashionably dressed women—at least they were dressed so—and quietlike, too, who held together—seemed to know one another—and a half dozen men no one knew, some old, some young. Two or three were real swells, I could see that, and the others kinder would-be’s. They kept aloof and afterwards vanished—hardly seemed to be acquainted! There were lots of strange rumors floating about. Poor Mrs. Ned—this is the end!”

That was a fact; the summing up was in that short description! Lawrence recognized it and the meaning, just as if he had been there to see.

“Now,” resumed the judge, mentally changing his tracks, “let me see if I’ve got your plans: you leave early to-morrow A.M.—seven o’clock—get to New York that night, and go on board the steamer the next afternoon. Is that it?”

“Yes, thank Heaven! I could wait till evening and till get there in time, but I’ll be glad to get away—

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

from everyone—from everything here! . . . Forgive me, that seems rude and thankless; I don't mean to be so—but——”

“ Oh, I understand, I understand, son; some things are better for no explanation, as I once said before. What are your further plans—when you get over t'other side? Don't go rushing off to the ends of the earth. Wait within call. What's the matter with Florida if you like warm weather? They say Quebec isn't half a bad place if you like it cold. Stay this side of the water.”

“ No, I've thought of some things I may do after I get to England, judge. If they seem possible, I'll write you. You've got the address of my bankers.”

“ I suppose you'll put up in town where you did last time? ”

“ The Holland, yes; but you talk as if you were going to say good-by to me at once! ”

“ That's just what I'm going to do, Larry. I'm not casual—you know that—but I must explain: I've got to leave for the West this evening to get some testimony on an important case, and got to get it before the other feller—which means to-morrow. . . . We're going to part, boy, here in a few minutes. But ”—he halted—“ I've some news. I saw Rublee last night—” The judge detailed the conversation held in the Mansion House bar uninterrupted. “ And now,” he concluded, “ there's just one thing else; it's——”

“ What, sir? ” Lawrence was a little surprised at the suddenness of the stopping.

“ I wish you wouldn't address me as 'sir' every now and then, Larry; it gives me a jolt—suggests some kind of mental disparagement.”

## THE LAST DAY

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“It slips out; I can’t help it; I mean just as much affection as respect. You’ve been brother and father to me, and confidant and counselor, too.”

The judge drew out his pocket handkerchief.

“I wish I had a son like— But I’m only a well-intentioned old flub, somebody ought to shoot in the back. However”—he blew his nose loudly—“I feel it in my bones that it won’t be long before we see one another again. By the way, I’ve got something here for you to take along.” He reached into his pocket. “A picture that I think just beautiful—just beautiful.” He handed the “something” to Lawrence, who turned to the light. He had spoken awkwardly enough, but his words were pliant with feeling.

“Did she—did she send it to me?” Lawrence’s voice shook.

Judge Hollins hesitated. “No; to be honest, I just asked for it at the house yesterday. I told her I knew somebody—that, er— And she just picked it up and gave it to me without a word. I was holding it back for the last day, the last minute—and—and I guess it’s come, boy.” He rose. “Nothing more I can do?”

“Nothing more, judge.”

“Just one little ‘*verbum sap*’ then: Somehow it’s got about that you saw the blowing up of the dam, and it’s known you’re going to leave. If I were you I’d take the train at Kenton Falls or Antioch. Your baggage is all checked now, and they may try to subpoena you at the station. I know a young assistant in Murger’s office, Charlie Wilcox, so I’ve got a pretty straight tip. Why not take the early trolley and avoid the possibility?”



## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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“Thank you; I’ll do that. I’ve only a bag; the rest of my things have gone.”

The judge rose and Larry did likewise.

“Well, son, I’m leaving. I kinder feel you’ll be called back here soon.”

“I don’t think it, judge. I’m afraid it’s good-by for a long time.”

The Anglo-Saxon parting or greeting has nothing of the spectacular or sentimental about it. Only the initiated know the undercurrent flowing and mingling in a simple hand-clasp.

That was all! the old lawyer’s fingers moved on Lawrence’s shoulder in the way they had; their eyes met—not quite dryly—their hands gripped, and when they parted neither turned to look again.

Lawrence closed the door of the study and took the picture to the window—Amy Bellwood with her two children at her knee! The boy was gazing at his mother, and Amy’s cheek rested against the little girl’s sunny head. They both were looking straight before them, and the resemblance was very marked. There was nothing posed, nothing strained, in the attitude. The judge had described it correctly, and Lawrence had made no comment upon it whatsoever at the time, which was the most comprehensive thing he could have done. Even now he stood there, feasting his eyes; his face did not change. The possession of it seemed to calm him; no extravagance of expression or of gesture could have told his feelings. At last he turned slowly and, walking into his bedroom, which was on the same floor as the library, he unlocked his bag, placed the photograph in a little leather portfolio, and closed the bag again.

## THE LAST DAY

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He wandered out of the house to the stables and down past the big empty barns through the kitchen garden to the pasture where in his boyhood he used to watch the herd of Guernseys—his grandfather's pet hobby. Everything seemed deserted and depressing. For the first time he missed Robin Adair. There had been so many things that had filled his mind since Sunday that the lost companion had been forgotten. But now he would have given a great deal for a touch of the stiff bristly head and a look into the honest yellow eyes. The parting with the judge had left a void that pained him; he had begun to feel for the old gentleman an affection quite as strong as he had felt for his own father—stronger, perhaps, in a way—for there was nothing puzzling about him. He was like an open book to those who touched his big, boyish heart and got inside the guard of his reserve. When would he see him again? How could he ever repay him for all the delicacy of his thoughtfulness? Lawrence had given up forecasting any future that depended upon the contingency of Franklin Bellwood's going out. He might live, as he had said, for years. He had driven from him the lurking, taunting hope, fearing its obsession, hating himself for its recurrence.

But the news that the judge had brought of Amy, and Dr. Rublee's report of the arrival at Peyton's, were not altogether reassuring so far as she was concerned. It started him worrying—thinking. . . . How duty held some types of women! How many unnamed, unknown female martyrs there must have been since the world began! His knowledge told him that the wonderful strength of mind and body she had displayed must surely have called so deeply upon her resources, that

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

of necessity some reaction must set in. How it would show itself he could not say. But having to keep up any feigned relation with her husband at the sanitarium was not the best way to relieve the strain. However, he had no part in it now; he could not help or advise; he had reached the level of dumb acquiescence, and on the morrow he would be going on toward something actual. He longed for a diversion; he hated to think of another night in the lonely house. By the way, that reminded him that he had not seen Mary or Margaret all the afternoon, and it would soon be supper time. He turned back through the garden.

Margaret waited on him alone that evening. She was a tall person of uncertain age; she had been a grown girl when he first remembered her. She looked fully as old as Mary, who had not changed to his eyes in the past twenty years.

"Where's your mother, Margaret?" he asked, noticing that the toast was not quite so carefully browned, and feeling something was amiss.

"She's down at my brother's, sir; one of the children was taken sick—the little boy."

"Too bad—I'm sorry. Will Mary be home to-night?"

"Oh, yes, sir; she said the last thing she'd be back by nine."

"I'll be in the study. Let me know when she comes."

"Yes, sir. . . . Oh, Mr. Lawrence——"

"Well?"

"Paddy Tevelin was here this evenin' to say 'Good-by' to you. I couldn't find you and I didn't know if you wanted to see him."

## THE LAST DAY

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“Had he been drinking?”

“Well, he was talkative. You didn’t go to Mrs. Rice’s funeral, sir. Sure there’s tales all about town of her bein’ buried with her rings on her fingers and a diamond comb in her hair.”

“I wouldn’t pay much attention to tales like that.” Lawrence had never seen Margaret so voluble; but it was all leading somewhere.

She dabbed at her eyes with a napkin. “If Mary isn’t back by nine, it’s bad news she’ll be bringing; and John’s horse is lame.”

“We’ll wait, and if she doesn’t come I’ll send for her,” said Lawrence, and with that he went into the library. For over an hour he paced there to and fro. . . . But nine o’clock came, Mary had not returned. A sudden idea seized him. Yes; it would give him something to do! He called from the door into the kitchen.

“Where does your brother live?” he asked.

Margaret, her face lighting up, told him. “Over beyond the hill—three miles”—he must know the place—“next the old schoolhouse.”

“Is Enoch out at the stable?”

Margaret thought so; if not, she could harness the horse! She seemed to anticipate his intention. But Enoch was there, and in twenty minutes the white-faced roan was at the door. No lantern was needed; the moon was almost at the full and was climbing above the eastern ridge. The damp cool air with the promise of frost in it cooled his brow as he drove away. He was glad of the impulse now—anything was better than the sepulchral study!

He drove through the town, getting glimpses

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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through lighted windows of family groups—fathers reading, mothers sewing; and once a crowd of children gathered about a talking machine, whose metallic notes reached to him as the horse began to walk slowly up the long incline. Somebody on foot, whom he did not recognize, passed by, greeting him suddenly out of the darkness, halfway up Cemetery Hill. He thought of the scene that had taken place there that afternoon. He could see the top of the gray granite obelisk that marked his own family plot. His depression was intensified! Everything seemed to increase it, to force the burden of his loneliness more heavily upon him.

Visible in the moonlight beside the road was a big gray boulder, upon which some religious enthusiast had scrawled the words in white paint: "Turn back! Hell yawns for sinners." The words half indistinctly caught his eye. Why should the disfiguring sentence linger in his mind? "Turn back!" He repeated it over to himself. That was exactly what he was doing, "turning back." As for the further threat, he had been saved from making a personal application of it, not from fear of the hereafter, but simply because it takes two to make some "sins." How strong and wise and faithful to life's duties she had been! He remembered his impassioned entreaty on the bank after the escape. It was better as it was! She had been right! The awakening, hard as it had been, might be nothing to the sure-coming morrow that would have greeted them. The fire of his fierce passion had changed to the steady burning of an altar flame. If he could serve no longer here, he still could worship—no matter where he'd be! But oh! the pain of the world, the joylessness of life!

## THE LAST DAY.

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Whatever was his place in it? why? why? . . . The horse seemed to be in a thoughtful mood also; he was walking slowly, his head pitched low. At this meditative pace he gained the crest of the hill at last. The moon was dodging in and out behind swift-floating clouds. He did not see a tall figure in a long coat walking some distance ahead of him in the road. It was dark as he reached the cemetery gates. On one side rose the stone wall, behind which the tops of a few white marble slabs shone dimly. On the other were thick bushes, and beyond an orchard, now bare of leaves, through which led a path to a rustic observatory; the view from there was far renowned. The moon burst from behind a stout black cloud, and for a moment flooded everything. Lawrence pulled in the reins and turned.

Surely he had heard something? He listened carefully. Yes, it was the clink of metal, ringing in steady, but half-muffled, blows. Then, all at once, his blood chilled. Yes, there! He could not be mistaken—just before the moon was hid again, he had seen a figure standing on the wall fling up its arms and disappear! He tried to pierce the gloom, but the shadows now hid everything. He listened intently, his heart beating in his throat. No sound. But he could not have been deceived, his eyesight and his hearing had never played him false. He stepped slowly to the ground, and making no noise, turned into the bushes until the back wheels of the buggy were off the road. He tied the horse there with a twist of the halter to a branch, and in another moment he was climbing the stone wall opposite.

He had not stopped to reason—in fact, he could



## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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hardly have explained his actions to himself. After the first shiver of excitement was over he went on mechanically. It was blind dark beneath the pines, but he made his way under the limbs into the open, and hastened forward, stumbling across the grassy mounds.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE MAKINGS OF A MYSTERY

**T**HE roan horse whinnied from the bushes as he heard the sound of hoof beats. A rubber-tired runabout, on the narrow seat of which were two men, stopped suddenly.

“What’s that?” exclaimed one in a thick voice. “Well, I’ll be— Here’s a buggy in the bushes!”

“Get out and see,” said another voice, still more hickly.

A large man descended and stood unsteadily, half holding to the wheels for support. The roan turned round to look at him and moved uneasily.

“Whatsh doin’?”

“It’sh all right, he’s tied,” said the one on the ground.

“What d’ye make of it?”

“I don’t know.” The man was coming back into the road again. “Seems to be all ri’.”

“Is it one of Kenyon’s rigs?”—Kenyon was the keeper of the Brimfield stable. “Funny sort of place to tie horse.”

The other lurched from the step into the seat. “Drive on!” he said. “It’s none ’f our business.”

The roan whinnied slightly again as the buggy went on down the hill.



## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

"Was one of Kenyon's rigs, Will?" asked the shorter man again. "Maybe it's sparkin' couple, gone up to the obshervatory to shee view." He chuckled gutturally.

"It was a white-faced roan," said the other. "Kenyon don't own white-faced roan. Good-lookin' rig, too."

"Letsh go back," said the driver, "and 'vestigate."

"No, drive on, Mac; Ellery's bar'll be closed."

As they reached the bottom of the hill the last speaker kept repeating to himself: "White-faced roan! Who owns white-faced roan?"

Wilford Murger and Barney McCutcheon, both of whom had attended Mrs. Rice's funeral that afternoon, were returning from Chase's roadhouse, where they had spent the evening, the one drowning a self-nursed sorrow, and the other, because, being a sleeping partner in Chase's enterprise, he generally put in some time each week, meeting constituents, at the only place where he could play the host in style. Pat Tevelin had been there, drinking sullenly, and the place had been full of rough characters.

Fred, the bartender at the Mansion House, had just closed the front door and was putting out the lights when the newly elected mayor of Kenton Falls, and the prosecuting attorney, entered with an affectation of much dignity from the side entrance. The bartender gave a glance at the clock; but his visitors were of too much importance to have their attention called to the lateness of the hour by any more emphatic sign.

It seemed to be a relief to Murger that the place

## ***THE MAKINGS OF A MYSTERY***

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was empty; just now, owing to his late elevation, he thought it better to keep up appearances.

The bartender closed the side entrance and locked it, as a hint that they were entitled to his confidence, and approached the table at which they had seated themselves.

"Fred," said Mr. Murger, looking at him with one eye, "who drives big white-faced roan to heavy-wheeled buggy?"

"Let's see," said Fred, untying his apron—another sign of confidence. "Dr. Kellogg does. Big horse, one white fore foot?"

"Yes."

Mr. McCutcheon ordered the drinks. "Thought you told me he knew somethin' 'bout the blowin' up of the dam," he said to Mr. Murger.

"He's leavin' to-morrow on the early train for good," put in the bartender, bringing the bottle and the glasses; "goin' to Yurruup."

"That so?" said Mr. Murger, interested.

"Yes, straight; Enoch Walker, his hired man, was in here to-day. Gettin' ready to go on a toot, I guess. Told me the doc's leavin' on seven o'clock train."

"That so?" repeated Mr. Murger. "Guess I'll meet him at the station. I told Wilcox to make out subpoena yesterday; didn't think he'd leave till evenin'." He drank his whisky slowly. Then, quickly putting down the glass, he spoke with suddenness, seizing Mr. McCutcheon by the coat. "Supposing—" he began. Then he stopped, arresting the expression of his thoughts. He dropped his hold on Mr. McCutcheon and remained silent. All at once he turned and spoke with little trace of difficulty this time.

## *THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE*

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"Could you give me a room here for the night, Fred?" he asked. "See that I get up for that early train?"

"Why, cert," said the bartender, who often acted as night clerk. "Sure, I can."

"Barney," said Mr. Murger, "think you can drive home alone?"

"Easy," returned the mayor of Kenton Falls, waving a far hand; "'f you'll help me get horse out of shed."

The bartender, a grin on his face, saw them through the door. Then, putting out the light, he went into the office while the two lurched down the portico steps. In a few minutes Mr. Murger returned, took the key and, renewing his admonition about being called in the morning, swayed himself upstairs.

A figure crawled down the stone wall and stumbled out into the road. The horse in the bushes whinnied again, turning his head as far as the halter would allow him. A moment later Lawrence Kellogg was untying him—the knot seemed hard to undo; his fingers were shaking and his breath, drawn through his clinched teeth, rasped harshly. Before he backed the roan out of the bushes he went to the edge of the road and listened. Hearing nothing, he cramped the wheels, and turning the horse's head, led him up the hill by the bridle, pulling him after him, as if the empty buggy was a heavy load. He stopped at the cemetery entrance, which was open, and led the horse through, closing the gates behind him. Shortly afterwards he opened the gates again and, getting into the buggy, drove down the hill.

## ***THE MAKINGS OF A MYSTERY***

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Brimfield had gone to bed, but more than one person was awakened by the heavy hoof beats going at full speed down the deserted main street.

When he arrived at the stable, Lawrence unharnessed the horse, with small regard to sequence of straps or buckles, left the buggy on the grass, and put the roan in the outside box stall. Then he let himself softly into the house through the back door, and going directly to his bedroom turned up the light. His clothes and hands were stained and muddy. He took off his coat with some difficulty—the movement pained him—and going to the basin washed his hands carefully. All the time he kept breathing hard, as if he had been running. It was cold, but, still in his shirt sleeves, he strode across the hall to the study and seated himself at the desk, on which were a pile of envelopes addressed and stamped. Searching in the drawer, he found a printed form and began to fill in the blank spaces, the pen held rigidly in his straining fingers. This done, he searched the drawers again and, finding some large sheets of paper, began to write, never pausing to correct or to reread. At last he finished, and, folding the writing and the printed form together, put both into a large envelope, addressed and stamped it, and sealed it with a dab of wax. Rising quickly he went to the bedroom again and changed his clothes and boots, crushing the things he had been wearing into the bag without folding them. He sat down on the edge of the bed for a moment, bolt upright. Then pushing himself to his feet, he went back to the library, where he paced up and down, his arms hanging straight at his side, his fingers snapping nervously. The tense expression never left his face. Oh, if the judge was here! If he

## *THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE*

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only knew where to find him! Every now and then he stopped and hid his eyes, pressing the palms of his hands against them, remaining motionless for minutes at a time. "No, no—I cannot—I cannot!" he once groaned aloud.

The lamp was smoking; he extinguished it. The dawn began to broaden. He raised the shade, opened the window, and then stood there, letting the wind blow full upon him.

Decision had generally marked his actions, but now he appeared like a man whose mind was all at sea. He was completely adrift—mentally and physically uncertain. He poured himself out a full tumbler of neat whisky—put it down untasted and never looked at it. One moment he sat at the desk and picked up a pen, the next he was standing at the window. A mad idea of clambering out and running—running till he could run no more swept his mind. He heard some one stirring in the kitchen. It was Margaret making the fire. He went to the kitchen door. The girl gave a cry as she saw him standing there. "For sake of the blessed saints, sir!" she exclaimed. "What is the matter?" Then she made her own interpretation. "The little boy!" she cried. "He was worse?—mother couldn't leave?"

"I didn't go there, Margaret." He came to the edge of the kitchen table. "What time was it exactly when I left last night?"

She could not tell to the minute—"Shortly after nine." To his next questions she replied mechanically, watching him with fascinated eyes.

Had Enoch gone out last night? Yes, she thought she had heard him at the stable about midnight. Hadn't he seen him? No; he had put up the horse himself.

## ***THE MAKINGS OF A MYSTERY.***

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He would be starting in a few minutes now; all he cared for was a cup of coffee. He left the kitchen, and, bare-headed, walked to the stable.

Enoch slept in a little chamber over the harness room with Tom, the stable boy. They had just awakened when they heard a voice call up the steep staircase. Enoch was red-eyed and logy—ashamed of himself for having been so precipitate in starting on his spree. But his master did not appear to notice any signs, or ask any disturbing questions.

“Harness up at once. I want Tom to drive me to Kenton Falls—and I want to see you in the house.” Without another word, he turned and left.

He was drinking his coffee, standing, for he had refused to eat even the tempting omelet, when Margaret announced that Tom and the trap were ready. The hired man stood shuffling on the back-door step. Then, for the first time, Lawrence noticed his condition, but still he said nothing. He handed him some letters and a big envelope, all stamped for mailing. “Enoch,” he said, “post these at the office this morning without fail. I have given you the horse and buckboard and harness. Get out your things to-day, yours and Tom’s; lock up the stable and leave the keys with Margaret.” With that he turned. Margaret was at his elbow. She started to say something. “Tom will drive to your brother’s when he comes back,” he said. “You and Mary take care of things. Judge Hollins will see you. Good-by.” He shook her hand. The girl said something he did not hear.

The big bag had been placed in the back of the buckboard; he shook Enoch’s hot, unsteady hand also. The man would have burst into contrite thanks if he

## **THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE**

had not hushed him with injunctions about the posting of the letters and seeing Judge Hollins upon his return. "Drive on," he said to the stable boy, and as they went out of the gate he never turned to look back at the house. His head was sunk on his chest, his lips drawn into a tight line.

"You needn't take me all the way to the Falls," he said, as they turned into the road. "Stop at the Reade Street corner. I will go in by trolley."

Three quarters of an hour later Mr. Murger was standing on the platform of the Brimfield Station. There were only a few passengers waiting for the express. Lawrence Kellogg was not among them.

The district attorney slipped a paper he had been holding into his pocket, and returned to the hotel. Probably Kellogg had decided to take the later train! He did not know that the man he was looking for had boarded the one he had just seen off at Kenton Falls.

A few minutes after Lawrence's departure, Pat Tevelin knocked on the back door; this time he had evidently been drinking! Hearing that he had called too late, he staggered unsteadily away again.

Late that afternoon the news editor of one of New York's big dailies devoted to sensationalism received the following telegram, dated from Brimfield, a place he had never heard of:

Send McKnight, or one of your best men, here at once. Great story. Don't fail. Shall I wire two thousand words at once? Can cover it to-day and to-morrow, but must leave then.

COLSON.

Eb. Colson had been a star reporter on his old staff and had never lost his scent for news, even if he had

## ***THE MAKINGS OF A MYSTERY***

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gone into a more lucrative and humdrum business. The city editor's reply was laconic and to the point:

McKnight coming. Cover till his arrival. Can use two thousand words.

Brimfield's evening paper, *The Gleaner*, was held back an hour this day. When it appeared knots of people stood everywhere upon the street discussing the startling news that it contained. Reporters had come down from Antioch, but Mr. Eb. Colson had pre-empted the telegraph office.



## CHAPTER XX

### STOPPED

**I**N twenty minutes the *Celtic* would be sailing. The gangways were crowded with a jumble of late arrivals, God-speeding friends, and messenger boys with flowers and baskets. Luggage was still being whipped in over the bow. A truckload of late mail came plunging down the pier, thundering over the wooden floor and echoing under the sheet-iron roof. White-coated stewards elbowed their way through the chattering, semiexcited groups on the decks. The gilt-bedecked purser was standing near the window of his little office at the head of the main companion-way, where the close air reeked with an odor of rubber carpet, roses, and packed humanity. Two thickset men approached the purser and drew him to one side. He listened to what they had to say with lifted eyebrows.

“I’ll see the captain,” he said at last. At the same time he sent for a certain steward, calling him by name. One of the thickset men studied the passenger list while he waited; the other, the bigger and taller, looked keenly about, staring into people’s faces.

On the upper deck, leaning over the rail, Lawrence Kellogg stood some distance apart from a group of young men, who were dancing attendance upon a tall,

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blond creature, whose arms were full of orchids. One of them was spreading before her the front page of a morning's paper, upon which her own picture was displayed. She snatched it from his hands laughingly, with some comment about "a suit for slander." The group moved away. Lawrence Kellogg had paid no attention to their presence; he had not heard a word they said—words were mere sounds to him. Then he noticed the paper lying on the deck. He had bought one himself, but it was down in his cabin; he had not looked at it. It was with difficulty that he could concentrate his mind on anything. He had changed so in the last few hours that anyone who knew him would have had to take a second glance to make sure that it was he. His face was drawn and haggard, without color; even his lips were bloodless; and his shot eyes, with deep hollows about them, moved unsteadily. All his good looks seemed washed away. He had the caved-in appearance of one suffering from some physical break-up, some hidden mortal illness. His gloved fingers on the rail shook constantly. As he moved, his feet lifted wearily like an old man's—no wonder, he had walked all night! He glanced down at the water, dirty and green, filled with floating *débris*. Half sickened at a sudden thought, he lowered his head, and as he did so, his glance fell on the paper again. He picked it up.

It was not the smudged picture of the actress that had caught his eye. It was a startling headline spread across three columns. The big type seemed to shout at him—"BRIMFIELD'S MYSTERY!"

It was out! They had it! But could it be true? Wasn't it madness—delirium? He leaned against the

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bow of the lifeboat behind him; the huge ship seemed to rise and fall as if upon the upheaval of a sudden and great sea; the iron roof of the long shed appeared to bend and sway. He could not focus his mind or sight. But at last he read it slowly, each word stinging through eyes to brain-like stabs of sharp-pointed needles. Here and there sentences seemed to be printed in red ink—so vivid were they!—the captions brought out by the news editor's unerring touch for the sensational. "*The finding of the body.*" So they had found the body! He had been right! But where? How? "*Arrest of one of the probable murderers.*" Who? who could that be? What! what was this! . . . "Patrick Tevelin, a local character of bad name, was arrested here this afternoon. It is expected that he will make a confession before night and implicate "*a person of importance*, whose arrest will astonish Brimfield's citizens." . . . "The victim was a man whose fame——"

Lawrence read no more. There was a clock on the front of the ferry house just beyond the pier. It was sailing time! They were getting in the hawsers. Strange he had not heard the gong, nor the call of "All ashore." Below him was the gangway, ready to be swung in. In another moment it would be too late!

He glanced at the companionway and saw that it was crowded. Without a moment's hesitation he threw his leg over the rail, and swinging free, lowered himself quickly. With the aid of a stanchion he reached the deck below. People gazed at him in astonishment, but no one stopped him. The sailor at the head of the gangway had his back turned as Lawrence hastened

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past. The man called something, but he did not hear. He plunged into the crowd waiting on the pier, elbowed his way through, and in a few swift paces had caught up with a cab that was just leaving the entrance. He gave the driver some directions, standing with his hand upon the door that he had opened. "And—Quick! quick!" he added hoarsely. "Five dollars if you get me there by four o'clock!" The cab clattered out onto the pavement.

Not twenty seconds after his departure, two men appeared at the head of the ladder. The sailor standing there spoke to them and pointed. The two men ran at full speed down the steep incline and fighting their way through the circle of people, who, waving handkerchiefs and calling messages, were expecting every minute to see the great ship move, they hailed a loitering hansom, one of them pointing to the cab that was just disappearing round the corner into a cross street. The driver leaned down, listening, as he gathered up the reins. "I heard what that gent said," he replied excitedly "Grand Central! Forty-second Street!"

"Drive there like hell!"

Huddled in the corner of the four-wheeler Lawrence Kellogg sat, his head in his hands.

"God! God! that it should have come to this!" All hope had forsaken him, all hope of hope! The verdict of chance and fate had consigned him to years of torment if he should have lived. But he had not wished to live. He had not cared. Never would his eyes have seen her again! (Oh, he had pictured the tempting, following sea on the voyage that was before him, the dark night, the lonely hour!) But now—! He must

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live! That was the worst of it. And probably he must see her, too! How could he face it all? As a man steps out with thrown-back shoulders and cool eyes to meet the leveled pieces of a firing squad, he must step out—he must not cringe or quiver. But had anyone ever before been called to face an ordeal so strange, so awful? And what did it mean—this news that he had read? It was beyond him, tangled in the net of fateful circumstance, from which he had struggled so fruitlessly and so long to free himself. He could not tell the story; there was no ending. But he had told himself his part in it over and over until it seemed that the repetition would drive him mad. Perhaps—! But here he was at his destination. How they had raced through the crowded streets!

He gave the driver of the reeking horse five dollars and ran inside the station. Luckily there was no waiting line. He bought his ticket. Hardly had he turned away when some one grasped his elbow; another instant and his sleeve was caught firmly from the other side. He turned and looked at the two set faces. One he knew—Bill Gould, the sheriff!

“Don’t try anything funny, Mister Kellogg,” said the other, the taller man.

He gazed back fearlessly. Now, in the face of the actual, the immediate, his spirit and courage swept to him once again! His reserves responded, reviving even the color in his cheeks. “Quick, get your tickets, Gould,” he cried hoarsely; “we’ve time to catch the train—here’s mine! To Antioch, *via* the Central!” He named the fare and walked swiftly toward the window.

Before the astonished men, fumbling in their pock-



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ets, had time to exchange a word he had bought the tickets himself. Holding them in his hand he started for the gates, his two companions keeping close to him. They were just in time to jump on the platform as the conductor waved his hand.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE ARRIVAL

**J**UDGE HOLLINS had hurried back to Brimfield. He arrived after a journey of eight hours to find the town agog with a disturbing excitement. Every kind of rumor was going about: "Tevelin had confessed that he alone had committed the awful crime."—"Tevelin had turned state's evidence and had given the name of his accomplice." The district attorney was supposed to know it. Wilford Murger—although not summoned as a witness—"had been seen talking to the coroner after the inquest." Another crime, it was said, had been attempted—"somebody had tried to force the iron gates of the Rice mausoleum. The lock had been hammered—and near by was found a crowbar and pickax!" Coming on the heels of the blowing up of the dam, Brimfield was getting a lot of notice in the papers!

During all this exciting time Mr. Colson had been ubiquitous. He had seen everybody, talked to those he wished to meet, and had been impressively unresponsive to others. The old, masterful, insistent reporter air had marked him. He had dashed from the Mansion House bar to the cemetery—from the cemetery to the Hill—from the Hill to the jail, and then taken up lodgings at the telegraph office. The local news men

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and the Antioch "journalists" had watched him with awe and admiration, and when the train had brought a heavy, keen-faced man from New York who registered at the hotel with the one word, "McKnight," the two got together and seemed busier than ever. But after the first flurried rushing, they cooled down to methodical mystery.

More strange stories started. Robbery! That was it! Mrs. Rice had been buried with all her rings and a tiara of diamonds! And then—just after Judge Hollins had returned home from Meadow Farm—the most startling, astounding bit of information gained headway: Lawrence Kellogg had been arrested in New York as he was about to escape from the country on the steamer *Celtic*!

Somebody greeted the judge with the news upon his arrival at the hotel, and this last rumor caused the old lawyer to stamp in open wrath. Who had started such an impossible, such an outrageous lie? What? Ellery Slocum had seen the telegram! Great Ananias! Wait till he saw Ellery!

But it was there! It had been addressed to Wilford Murger, but Mr. Eb. Colson had the original copy now. He showed it to him. Ellery leered triumphant over his shoulder.

Found Kellogg Grand Central; returning Antioch with  
Leary. GOULD.

"Why," exclaimed the judge, addressing those about him, "anybody but a dodgasted idiot could read *that* telegram right! 'Found Kellogg returning to Antioch.' Of course he was returning to Antioch!"



## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

That's the quickest way to get here, and the Grand Central would be where he must start from. He must have seen the account of this terrible thing in the papers, and was rushing back quick as God would let him! What you busybodies, and you rumor spreaders, and you yellow-stained newspaper fakers won't say next——"

He glared at Mr. Colson and Mr. McKnight, but they only exchanged glances and led the judge good-naturedly aside, Mr. McKnight taking out a handful of loose paper sheets from his pocket and producing a pencil.

"See here, judge, you're a great friend of Dr. Kellogg's; you wouldn't mind telling us——"

"No; I'll be damned if you interview me!" vociferated the old gentleman. "No, sirs! I'll tell you this——"

The operator from the station plucked his arm: "Wire for you, judge," he said. "You wasn't to your office."

It was with difficulty the old lawyer refrained from tearing the envelope open; but he slipped it into his pocket. "I was there two hours ago," he replied to the operator.

"Must just ha' missed you," returned the latter.

The judge drew away—all this happened on the Mansion House porch—and, standing under the glare of the arc lamp, read the message. Without a word he started on a trot across the street.

Mr. McKnight was asking the telegraph man a question and giving him a glimpse of a twenty-dollar bill.

"No, sir; I can't do that," the operator answered, but he gave a leading glance after the judge.

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The latter had reached the door to the stairway, on the first landing of which was his little office. A woman, standing in the shadow, met him.

"Hello! Who's this?"

"Mrs. Tevelin, sir—you remember me."

"Yes; what is it?"

"Pat sent me to find you, sir. I've been looking for you all day. He wants to see you at the jail. Couldn't you come to-night? They'd let you in."

"No, ma'am; I couldn't come to-night." It had been the judge's idea to keep as far away from Mr. Tevelin as he could; but now the case had altered. "Tell him I'll be in—first thing in the morning—but to say nothing; not a word!"

"Oh, he won't tell anything; mad horses couldn't drag anything out of him! But shure, sir"—Mrs. Tevelin began to sniffle—"he's innocent as the babe unborn!"

The man on the back platform of the waiting Anioch trolley car rang two bells.

"In the morning!" The judge half shouted the words again to the woman, and started on a run. The conductor helped haul him onto the step by the slack of his coat.

All this had been observed by the two reporters from the Mansion House veranda.

"Beat it! Follow him, Mac!" cried Mr. Colson, suddenly. "I'll stay here and trail the woman."

Mr. McKnight, despite his heavy frame, proved himself a man of unexpected prowess and resource. He dashed after the trolley like a sprinter, and caught it as it droned and snarled, sparkling about the corner. All out of breath he stood on the rear platform, his

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back to the window. The judge, sitting in a cross seat in the forward compartment, had not seen the chase. He was reading the telegram over again.

Now he wished he had asked Amy the questions he had spared her! But he would soon find out the real solution of the more important parts of the mystery. He had tried to possess his soul in patience, but his effort only increased the pitch of his nervousness and anxiety. He taxed the conductor with needless delay at the railway crossing, and thought of bribing the motorman to make up lost time. But it was all unnecessary. He had some minutes to wait, as he perceived by a glance at his big watch as he stepped to the ground at the terminus. He did not know that the reporter had swung himself off the trolley just before it reached the square in front of the Union Station. Not knowing what else to do with himself, the old gentleman went out on the platform and began a restless walking to and fro.

Several locals arrived and departed. Some long freights thundered past, leaving odors of oil, malt, and live stock; but at last the bright headlight of the express was seen swinging sinuously into the maze of the yard. As the heavy train stopped, the judge eagerly scanned the descending passengers. From the last car but one there appeared three large men. He recognized Lawrence first and then the other two—Gould and Leary, the chief of Antioch's police!

The judge's spirits went soaring up to the top notch of his mental register. He advanced with a smile of joy; he thought he had seen Lawrence's face gleam at sight of him; his head was up, his shoulders straight. The judge almost took him in his arms.

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“Welcome back, my boy,” he cried. “Welcome back.”

Lawrence bent toward him slightly. “Did you get my letter, judge?”

The old lawyer looked at him blankly. “Letter! What letter?”

“Why the one I wrote before I left—the one with the inclosure—the one in the big envelope, sealed with sealing wax. Did you read it all?”

The tones of his voice were flat and hollow; there was no ring to them.

“My stars, Larry, I got no letter! Where did you send it?”

“To your office, two days ago. Have you been there?”

“Yes, I was there this afternoon for some time. Got lots of letters, but none from you. I thought of wiring you at the Holland early this morning, but——”

Lawrence stopped in his tracks suddenly. The judge saw him grow paler and paler in the glare of the electric light. He was moistening his lips, as if he was trying to say something, but found it difficult. “Then—then you do not know,” he faltered, his hand lifting to his forehead.

For the first time the judge perceived how close Captain Leary was standing; in fact, if one man could have surrounded another by mere suggestion of personal environment, Leary was accomplishing the feat!

“Come on, gentlemen,” he gruffly suggested. “Don’t let’s stop here.”

They were halfway through the arched entrance that led to the street at the end of the brick station. The

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causeway by which the tracks were crossed was to their right. On the steps above them stood a man leaning down, endeavoring to listen; he had removed his hat, and was holding it back of his ear as a receiver.

The judge turned toward Leary. "What have you got to do with this?" he challenged.

"Now, see here, judge," replied the captain in a conciliatory manner, "I know you and you know me. This man is wanted; that is all there is to it, and we've got him."

"I will be responsible for Dr. Kellogg's appearance at any time and any place you may want him. You just stated you know me and that ought to be sufficient."

The judge glanced round him as if in search of rescuers; but there was no one in sight except their little group of four. Leary shook his head and made a motion as if to take Lawrence by the arm.

"I don't guess yes, judge."

"There is no warrant for him—no charge."

"Oh, yes, sure!"—it was the sheriff who answered this time—"and I have got the warrant right here in my pocket."

"What is it?"

"Murder."

The judge was rendered speechless. Lawrence smiled a wan, bewildered smile.

"Now you see this is no place to stand and talk." Again the captain's voice was smooth with a note of condescension. "Come along over to the Four Courts, and you can have a get-together party. Guess the sheriff'll let you have his office for a few minutes before"—he emphasized the next few words—"this gen-

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tleman retires for the night. . . . We will make him as comfortable as we can."

There was no more to be said. Still holding the judge's arm, Lawrence crossed the street, the sheriff and Leary falling in behind. Before they had reached the opposite sidewalk Mr. McKnight had darted down the steps, and, hurrying up swiftly, touched the chief of police on the shoulder.

"How'dy do, Captain Leary?" he said. "You've not forgotten me? Used to know you in Mulberry Street when I was on the *Sun*—McKnight." And then, before the captain had time to rebuff or to accept him, he went on as if everything was understood between them. "You got him, didn't you? Good work! You're an old hand at that! Any story in this for me? You know how it was in the days when I was a cub reporter. You used to help me out; now we can do each other a good turn."

Mr. Gould had viewed this strange proceeding somewhat mystified, but the captain recognized the sign of the brotherhood and fell behind. He whispered Mr. McKnight all the way to the building with the narrow windows that was attached to the florid courthouse, like a misfit Siamese twin, by the long artery of sheet iron.

"Now, don't quote me, see?" were his last words, as Mr. McKnight hurried off in the darkness. In a few swift steps the captain had joined the others.

In the bare and brilliantly lighted sheriff's office, Lawrence Kellogg and the judge sat together at the corner of a table covered with a stained and faded green cloth. In the same changed, lifeless voice Lawrence had told his story without interruption, but never for an instant did the old lawyer take his eyes off him.

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“Lord, boy, this is awful—terrible—dreadful! Let me collect my wits. . . . You say you wrote out just what you told me now. . . . You are sure you gave this envelope to be mailed—you did not leave it on your desk?” The judge’s voice, too, had a strange quality in it; he breathed stertorously.

“I gave it to Enoch just as I told you. As to what I wrote—it was like a nightmare, vivid at the time, but impossible to relate coherently, perhaps, or to recall in sequence.”

“Well, Enoch’s been around drunk the last two days. Those damned reporters have had him in tow. They have been up to your house, too, I understand, but Mary drove them off with a mop. We will have to look to Enoch.” The old lawyer was evidently feeling for something to say. “Of course, if we get these papers now, it will not be too late; they will go a great way, especially the certificate—that will prove your intention clean as a whistle. But what was Frank Bellwood doing on the hill at night?—I often used to see him walking there in the daytime. And how about Tevelin? Sure you saw no one?”

Lawrence looked up. “I saw no one; I passed somebody on the road who spoke to me—maybe it was he. What has Tevelin said?”

“I haven’t seen him, but I understand that he has said nothing. These reports have been mere fabrications. I did not intend to get mixed up in the affair at all! I concluded to keep out of it altogether. But now, of course, I’ll have to see him—I promised, tomorrow morning. Then I’ll come back to you at once.”

“Tell him to tell everything!—Anything, as long as it’s the truth. . . . That’s what I’m going to do.”

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The judge started. "Now, hold on, Larry! The truth is all right in the abstract, it is 'mighty and *may* prevail'; but sometimes it is the worst thing to tell offhand. Pho! People never hear the whole truth about things; if they did they probably wouldn't understand it. We had better—er—sort of make things fit."

"But I don't want to 'make things fit.' I want it to come out just as it is—everything—that's the only way. Of course, no matter what happens, all is changed. There is no hope left for me in any direction. I want to shut this part of my life out forever when it's over with, just as I've shut out all that has gone before! But, nevertheless, it must be the truth—the truth."

"Now, hold on, son, not so fast! I cannot agree in or suggest anything yet. This is all I know: Frank Bellwood disappeared from Peyton's Sanitarium. Almost before his absence was known, his dead body was found in a partly filled-in drain at the corner of the cemetery. It is reported that he was seen in Brimfield late in the evening. Your story, to most ears, would seem weird and strange, and, though it is true, nothing could look less like the truth to those who did not know you and only viewed the circumstances—I have it! Maybe it was——"

The judge's under jaw dropped suddenly, then he closed his mouth like a trap, and after a pause took a new direction rather aimlessly. "I began to tell you at the station that I thought of telegraphing you this morning from Evanton, soon as I saw the account in the paper. Then I got to hoping you wouldn't hear of it and would sail. You'd had enough worry, and I



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thought your presence wasn't needed. But my poor boy!"

"Of course my presence was needed. . . . I ran away because it seemed to be the easiest thing. It was weak and cowardly—what made me, I don't know—I can't explain it. . . . But I was afraid. It must have been, I was afraid!"

The words had been whispered hoarsely, with a deliberateness that emphasized the weight of the speaker's self-condemnation. The judge rose and walked round the table and bent over Lawrence's chair. He placed a kindly hand on his lowered head, and his voice sank to a whisper also.

"Now, hold on, Larry! I won't have you talk that way. It wasn't weak and cowardly. I won't have you use those words. As for 'being afraid'—I've been thinking it all over as we've sat here, and I see it was the most natural thing to do." He was speaking softly, consolingly, but with an effort. "Suppose you told this strange story, what proof had you? No one would have believed you if they didn't find the body, would they?—and certainly no one would, if they *did* find it, hidden the way it was. In the light of what you've told me now, your condition of mind was apparent. Of course, if I'd been here— But—Lord! Lord! how often innocent men have done that sort of thing! You mustn't arraign yourself—that's all! . . . No more such talk! You never would have deceived me—or Amy—either of us." He stopped and then spoke all at once with the lift of an inspiration. "You were thinking of her all the time, not of yourself; you were afraid—for her!"

Lawrence felt a grateful warmth run through him.

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Yes, it had been for her! Even in his precipitate flight he must have reasoned it out. Had he? It was all so confused, so unbelievable! He lifted his head and listened to the kindly voice that still ran on. . . .

“Yes, yes. That’s it, of course; you forgot yourself entirely.” The judge appeared to be heartened by his own arguments. “But this Tevelin story puts a different view on it. You couldn’t go—leaving an innocent man to be accused; as soon as you heard that, you began to reason. So you came back. That I understand. It’s the way you’re built. Now, what the district attorney has heard I haven’t the least idea; Murger is responsible for both the warrants being issued; but look here a minute! . . . No one can gainsay the fact you returned here of your own accord, and of course now, since these nasty yellow sheets have taken it up—and since you—since your name has been dragged in, it’s best you’re here—eh?”

Lawrence Kellogg glanced about him without replying—the judge, in his last rather bewildered endeavor to lend encouragement to the situation had been grimly humorous.

“I’m here,” he said at last. “But now a question that I dread to ask. . . . Does Amy know?” For the first time the hopeless, unnatural voice shook with fear.

“You mean about you being—er—dragged in?”

“Exactly.” Lawrence’s face twitched. “Tell me.”

The judge faltered; he gasped and did not answer this directly. “She’s really very sick, Larry—Dr. Smith was at the house when I left. He’d have sense enough to keep any such news from her. Maybe he stayed there overnight—she hadn’t heard—she thought

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you'd sailed. . . . She doesn't know now—I'm sure she doesn't!"

"Then, for God's sake keep it from her for a while. Get her away! Can't you get her away? I can never see her—never see her again! We must not meet. Let her hear the truth some day—the truth—the truth! But don't ever let her name appear—hide it from her until this is over."

Judge Hollins almost rejoiced at the animation of the speaker's tones—the dull, hopeless attitude had frightened him.

"Yes," he replied, "we must keep her out if we can—we must, for many reasons. Oh! by the way, did you mention Amy's name in that letter you wrote me?"

"No, I left her out; I thought you might have to use the papers legally. Don't let her be mentioned."

"We'll do our best. I'll go out there the first thing in the morning——"

"Sorry to interrupt you, judge."

It was Captain Leary standing at the door. "You can see your client any time to-morrow. I'll make him as comfortable as I can. But, as I often have to tell folks—'Time's up now.'"

The judge flushed red in hopeless anger. Lawrence rose quietly.

A turnkey was standing there behind the captain.

"You'll go with *him*," said the latter, beckoning to Lawrence with a heavy forefinger.

The keys jangled and a door clanged down the corridor. With a bursting heart the judge heard it, as Leary waved him forth, into the outer, freer air.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE LEAGUE OF SILENCE

**D**R. SMITH had spent the night at Lower Meadow Farm. He had just finished his dressing, when Ellen, who had moved on with the children from the rectory where the Rev. Remsen Bache had now installed himself, told him in a whisper that Judge Tollins had called to see him on very urgent business.

The doctor found the old lawyer, hands clasped behind him, pacing up and down the hall. Despite the cordial, though low-spoken, greetings, there was a feeling of strangeness—almost of embarrassment—in their manner. It disappeared, however, at the first question and reply.

“How’s Mrs. Bellwood this morning, doctor?”

“I haven’t seen her yet. She was very calm and brave last night. I think she rested. She is still going on her nerves. You see it isn’t grief alone that is the matter; just a general let down. Bound to have some.”

“You will stay here to-day with her.”

“Yes, I have made arrangements to. There are no men in the family and—and somebody ought to be here; but of course you’ll stay, too, won’t you? Probably he will be able to see us both in a little while. You know the first thing she said to me was that she wished

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to get away. . . . This is a strange and tragic situation, isn't it?"

"Strange and tragic!" repeated the judge, searching the doctor's handsome face. "Well, I should— . . . Get your hat and come out of doors. I can speak better to you out there; and we won't be overheard. I didn't intend to come to the house—but the boy I sent up was afraid of the dog."

Dr. Smith opened the front door slowly, disturbing a big tousled beast lying on the door mat. "Come on," he said. "I don't need a hat. Where will we go—to the garden?—Get up, Gruff! get out!"

"That's all right, we're old friends!—known him from a puppy. . . . Just walk down to the gate with me; I have a buggy waiting there. I came up on foot so as not to disturb anyone."

As they stepped from the porch to the grass-grown driveway, the judge turned. "I don't want her to see me. . . . Can we keep out sight of her windows?"

"She's on the other side of the house, judge; she won't see us. It's a heavenly day, isn't it?" For some reason the doctor's embarrassment appeared again.

"Yes, 'fine days for sad doings.' . . . But now, let me ask you something, and then let me talk; I must be back at the station in half an hour."

"I am listening; what is it?"

"Does Amy know that Lawrence Kellogg is at Antioch? Has she heard anything of this horrible—this dreadful—accusation?"

"Not a word yet; no one has seen her. Of course, those reporters were out here yesterday, but they got no farther than that big tree there. No one has been to the house. I have even kept the anxious condolers

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away. Some distant relatives of his turned up and made some bother. But they're all loyal here, including the old Newfoundland. Of course, no one knows anything definite; many people believe Tevelin killed Frank Bellwood—Amy thinks *that*. He had a grudge against him."

"Doctor, she mustn't hear of this! You know how these yellow news hounds twist and contort things! They'll drag anything—anybody in. Wouldn't it be the worst thing that could possibly happen for her to hear of it? But what in the Lord's name can we do? If we could only get her away at once—now! There is a lot that it is not necessary for me to go into; there's talk going round now about Lawrence and Bellwood having quarreled; but keep this from her, man—at least, until we know more of what may happen."

Dr. Smith drew a long breath of the fresh morning air, crisp with the promise of cold winds. "I don't intend that she shall hear of it!" he said. "That is, certainly not for some time to come. . . . I am going to devote myself to that," he added; "I've made plans to that end."

The judge seemed to forget that he had much to say himself. "What are they?" he asked. "I have been thinking and thinking, but could not see all clearly. I've been afraid that, if she appeared—my stars!—we'd hear: 'The motive!—the motive!' and the vultures would gather and gloat. Damn 'em, can't you see 'em?"

"Well, in the first place," put in the doctor, "you know I've always been a friend—I wish to prove it."

"We never know our friends till trouble comes," commented the judge.

"I was a friend of the old colonel's," went on the

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doctor, responding a little to the pressure of the elbow on his own, "and you know that I was always a great admirer of Mrs. Bellwood—and her mother is a connection of my family, and she was always very good to me. But when Amy Winter was working at the hospital I saw enough of her to make that early admiration lasting. Now I have an opportunity to do something for them, and I am going to do it."

"And Larry Kellogg—surely you must! . . . You don't believe any of this—" The judge had paused for a word to express his meaning.

"Not a bit! It is all some terrible misunderstanding—that I'm sure. It will all come out—he's in good hands. . . . I knew how you had had to take hold of matters there with him, so Rublee and I have attended to matters here—about the funeral and all that."

"Did you attend the inquest? Because there's something I want to ask."

"No, I thought it better not. I did not wish to be called afterwards."

The judge thought for a moment. "There is no doubt as to how Frank Bellwood died—is there?" he asked.

"None in the least—a heavy blow on the back of the head, poor devil! Skull crushed! See Rublee; he'll tell you all about it. The service will be held this afternoon."

"Will Amy go?"

"She insists. But I will be there; no one shall speak to her."

"But your plan?"

"Well, it's this," began the doctor. "It just happened that I was going off on my vacation, and it struck

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me that never did things occur so opportunely. By twelve o'clock to-morrow Mrs. Winter and Amy and the children, too—will be miles away. The old lady is able to be moved, and Mrs. Bellwood has agreed. She wishes to get away as much as we wish to have her. It was all just a bit of good fortune. . . . Pinchott, the president of the Denver road, had ordered a new special car—sort of traveling hotel affair—made here in the shops. I was going West to join him for a shooting trip—and he asked me to bring it on and bring any friends I wanted. There is room for the whole family, and I have added Miss Bromley—Senator Bromley's daughter, you remember—the best nurse in the hospital—to the party. We go over to Maitland Springs this evening about dusk in my big car and take the train from there. It will be a sudden departure, but what of that? Mrs. Blatchford is away on a visit. Surely, there is nothing here to keep them; and if there is talk, we won't hear any of it, that's certain. . . . Amy won't be drawn in now!"

The judge looked up at a flock of blackbirds, dotting the sky in their undulating flight to the southward. He felt an unvoiced prayer of thanks welling to his lips. Surely the Lord was tempering the wind. His eyes moistened. "At the end of the journey," he asked, "where will you go?"

"Far enough away not to hear any outside voices," said the doctor. "There is a little shooting lodge near a way station in Colorado—I own a greater share of it. They will stop there, where they will be comfortable and alone. I leave them in charge of Miss Bromley, and go on with Pinchott to the mountains. No one has heard of this except the people at the house and



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old Rublee." He scribbled an address on the fly leaf of his notebook and tore it out. "Now you leave everything to me," he continued. "It is all over here, though no one expected such a tragic end. Of course, I'd stay if I could—if my staying would help poor Kellogg. But I don't see how it can. As I said before, he is in good hands. I don't suppose that the grand jury will indict from the facts alone; by the way, what are they? If you care to tell me."

The judge paused before replying. "Facts," said he, "are the hardest things in the world to face, because, seen from one standpoint they are as white as the snow on a mountain, and from another, black as"—his metaphor failed him—"black as my hat," he added absently. "But look you here, doctor," he said, "Lawrence Kellogg is the finest man that ever drew breath!—as innocent—but of course I don't have to go into that! He would be free to-morrow—no, not to-morrow, but when the grand jury meets—if he'd only let a lawyer manage in a lawyer's way; but he's one of those Sir Galahad sort of persons that we read about—seldom meet 'em, thank Heaven! If the armor of truth ever stood for anything, it's got a test coming in this trial."

"Then you think the grand jury will indict?"

"I don't see anything else but that in the evidence, as it is bound to come out; he's going to make his own case against himself—the insane idiot! Oh, the truth! the truth! My stars! what is evidence, anyhow?—just a combination of happenings and a few words linked together, and a finger to point the way a crooked wind blows twisting straws! What Murger based his first action on I don't know. However, I cannot go into the details now. Better you didn't know anything about

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it. You will forgive my ambiguity. I have got to catch the train to Antioch; the pesky trolley line's out of business again. Good-by! Tell Amy I approve of all you do, and so will Lawrence Kellogg. But don't say I mentioned his name. Better not say I was here at all. Ellen won't tell."

"Judge," said Dr. Smith, extending a detaining hand, "I'm going to ask a question that, under the circumstances, may seem strange; but even if you meet it with your silence, it will make no difference so far as my carrying out my plan may be concerned." He spoke slowly, as if weighing his intention of proceeding.

"Well," rejoined the judge impatiently, giving a glance at the waiting buggy, only a few paces distant. "Well, what is it?"

"Is Lawrence Kellogg in love with Amy Bellwood?"

"Now listen to that!" exclaimed the judge, turning full upon him. "Shall I attempt to qualify as a mind reader? I'll tell you this much: Amy Bellwood is not the kind of a woman to enter into any *post obit* entanglement. If Lawrence Kellogg is not in love with her, then he is a different sort from what I ever took him to be; but that he will assert or allow himself to think that— He is an obstinate, pig-headed young ass when it comes to—" The judge appeared to be hopelessly tangled. "Well, when he gets clear of this mess—and he will get clear of it, if there is common sense or justice in the land and twelve men can be found to possess the rudiments of either!—he'll go off somewhere: North Pole, South Pole, up in a balloon! any place to take him far and away from things that have been close to him. I couldn't swerve him, and no one else could. Just now, thank God! Amy thinks he's

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out on the broad Atlantic! But of this much rest assured: he seeks her happiness more than he loves his life. Will that do you? Don't, for Heaven's sake, make me lose my good opinion of *your* common sense! I am a lawyer of a fairly large experience, and you are a surgeon of a world-wide reputation, and what can either of us tell of what's in a woman's mind? Read for yourself; I can't be your interpreter there."

"I only wanted to know if it was all fair," said the doctor, tapping at an ant-hill with his foot.

"Fair!" echoed the judge. "You wouldn't do anything unfair! But for the love of the Lord, take a look at this awful situation! As for her, she never made a move or had a thought that wasn't part of her—pure, and straight, and honest, and strong; and we're all trying to guard her—let us only think of that. We trust each other and will do our best. And now, God bless you! doctor—I must be off, or miss my train. Write me from along the route, and see that she does not get a newspaper in her hands—they will be full of all this for the next two weeks. Good-by."

He climbed into the buggy. The boy woke up the horse with a jerk. One thing the judge had intended to ask when he at first sought this interview had been left unsaid and he had fully expected to bring the doctor back with him to Antioch.

Since six o'clock that morning the judge had been with Tevelin at the jail, and what he had ascertained from that hitherto taciturn individual had set his spirits going up and down in rather a disconcerting fashion. If Tevelin should remain silent, or deny everything, turning to his friend and enemy the bottle, to prove the mental alibi of know-nothing, there was hardly a scrap

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of direct evidence to connect his client with what had happened at the cemetery. But if Lawrence Kellogg insisted in that uncomfortable—no, more—in that blasting intention of his, that Tevelin should tell the truth, it would amount to furnishing state's evidence. For, if crime had been committed, he was an accomplice! He could supply the prosecution with enough material to go on, and if the grand jury should hear the facts, it would insure at least an indictment. Indeed, the conduct of the subsequent trial would practically be taken out of a lawyer's hands. As to the missing letters: Enoch, whom he had also seen, was positively sure that he had posted everything that had been given him at the office the morning of Lawrence's departure! There was only one thing that tended to dispel the gloom: Amy Bellwood would not be drawn into the trouble, and would not now be forced to testify as to the relations—friendly or otherwise—that had existed between Frank Bellwood and the man accused of doing him to death. The thought of her on the stand made the judge shudder! But the horrible position, that could be so misconstrued—of a woman trying to save a man accused of her husband's murder—would be done away with, if the doctor's plan did not miscarry, and if those intrusted with the secret maintained their silence. That Mrs. Bellwood should wish to get away from the scene of so much grief and sorrow would seem only natural to most people. The most hardened yellow journalist would scarcely dare—knowing nothing of the circumstances—to connect her name with the case that would surely, if she was summoned as a witness, be worked into the sensational form of modern "literary" journalism.

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By forcing the old livery nag to a gallop, the judge had succeeded in catching the train. As he sat in the smoker, crunching at an unlighted cigar, his eagerness to recount to Lawrence the news of Amy's coming departure almost discounted the depression caused by Pat Tevelin's recital of what he had seen and heard—and of the part he had taken in the mystery of that moonlit night. The judge had no idea that Tevelin, in charge of Sheriff Gould, had left Brimfield, and was now domiciled at the Antioch County Jail.

A newsboy came through the car at Kenton Falls with the New York papers. The judge bought them all—they made a heavy burden on his knees—but the first one that he picked up contained what he was looking for, and he threw the others into the empty seat ahead.

On the opening sheet was the account of a sensational divorce case, with pictures of the principals, beautifully ornamented with scroll work, interlaced with broken wreaths of orange blossoms, overturned champagne glasses, and fractured hearts, symbolical of this particular venture in matrimony. Below was a diagram, drawn with minute detail, but without any veracious regard for topography, of the Brimfield cemetery. Crosses marked the points of interest: "Where blanket was found," "where body was buried." The Rice mausoleum loomed large as a cathedral. Even the buggy tracks were reproduced; and there was a picture of an open drain, and several workmen standing about. There were drawings, also, of a crowbar and pickax. Mr. McKnight had made the most of his materials; but evidently they had not been sufficient, for the editor had called upon the staff artist for fancy pictures of "the alleged murderers": "Patrick Tev-

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lin," who might have stood for a portrait of Bill Sikes, and "Dr. L. P. Kellogg," represented with hair carefully parted in the middle and a beard like an Assyrian bas-relief. Appended was a photograph of Franklin Bellwood—gathered from what source the judge knew not—taken just at the time he had entered the ministry. The text that accompanied these illustrations deserved better framing; McKnight's able pen had sketched cleverly the town, its surroundings, and some local characters. It would seem that all Brimfield's business had been suspended for the time being, owing to the interest in the great sensation. Much was made of the newspaper men's assistance, and little details of evidence were worked into scare headlines.

The only reference to the wife of the "victim of the murder plot"—for that there was a "murder plot" this paper seemed bound to prove—was that she "had been the belle of the village," and now, "overcome by shock and grief," was visiting relatives, but would surely make her appearance at the trial, "when sensational developments might be expected."

Filled with disgust and anger, the judge turned over the remaining pages. Prize fighters, baseball scores, murders, abductions, defalcations, and comic pictures, the usual *olla-podrida* of sensation and rot—delectable to the masses. This was topped off, as it were, by an editorial of babbling condescension and advice on the care of children's teeth.

The judge crumpled the paper in his hands, and then carefully smoothed it out again and placed it in his pocket just as the train pulled into the Antioch station.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### ANÆSTHESIA

**I**N the moments of the deepest human sorrows come strange, numbing passages of time when, as it were, the divine opiates are at work stilling the ache that would be too great to bear. Thoughts, words, are impotent, tears are absent; the supersenses acknowledge their defeat before the presence of the actualities.

Lawrence Kellogg did not reason that it was the loss of hope that so overswept and deadened him. He looked back on a dead-and-gone part of his life. He had faced out the actuality; faced it during that sleepless trudging of the city's streets when he had thought of the one way out; faced it when he had accepted the coming temptation of the waves in the steamer's wake! But he must live now—live as a man might who had gone from one existence to another. He had no right to end it. Never for one moment had fear for self laid hold of him. He could view his own position—a man accused of having on his hands the blood of another who had once been his friend—uncowed, upstanding. It did not cause him a lift of pulse on account of his own danger. He bowed acceptance.

Judge Hollins, at their first interview, had seen the futility of arguing him to view events from any standpoint of practicality. In regard to the unput ques-

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tion, that he saw decided in his client's mind—whether a man, who had been accused of the taking of another's life, could, if freed before the world, take that dead man's wife as his own—seek her out and ask her to share with him the burden that would be jointly theirs. That was an ethical point beyond the judge; he would accept no brief there! But it was not fear of the dread, sure-pointed finger of the caviling world that had caused Lawrence Kellogg to shut that question out from self-debate; it was not the venomous whispers, though from these he would have shielded her at all loss to himself. It was the feeling that, even if there were no whispers, no stabbing eyes, even if the secret were only known to them—he had no right to ask another to share his hopelessness of spirit, his utter loneliness of soul! The man who had said “He would like to see me dead!”—who had accused him in these words before the woman who knew the secret of both their hearts—had spoken true! Now he *was* dead. The world, made up so much of pointed fingers and envenomed whispers, would point and whisper, no matter any verdict! He would face it all alone!

At the end of the corridor, up and down which Lawrence Kellogg was walking, was an open space through which could be seen the inclosed court, surrounded by cell doors. Through the grating occasionally appeared pale faces; hands often grasped the bars; sometimes an oath or a snatch of song echoed from below. For some reason, as he passed, the prisoner's attention was attracted. Looking down, he perceived Captain Leary, and talking to him, no one less than the prosecuting attorney! Mr. Murger's back was turned,



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but Lawrence recognized him in an instant. A keeper joined them, and, opening one of the cells, spoke sharply to some one inside. Almost immediately a man stepped out—Pat Tevelin. He made a slouching salute, to which there was no return, and, after a few words from the district attorney, he followed him and the captain out of sight. Just at this moment Lawrence heard his name called and, turning, saw a keeper beckoning.

“Judge Hollins is here,” the man said, “and wants to speak to you.”

“Where can I see him?”

“Have to come up here, I guess. The district attorney’s in the sheriff’s room.”

Lawrence entered the cell and sank slowly down on the narrow cot. He looked up a moment later, trembling in his expectation, to see the judge standing there at the entrance. He came forward, and, without a word of greeting, sat close beside him, placing a heavy hand on his knee.

“Now, Larry,” said he, “I’ve got lots to tell you—we’ll have the good news first: Amy Bellwood will soon be on her way to Colorado. She still thinks you are on the ocean.”

Lawrence caught him by the hand. “Thank God for that,” he said quietly, taking a deep breath like a fervent amen to a silent prayer. “But tell me! I had ceased to worry—I knew that you’d arrange it somehow—I trusted you to do it. I was sure you would.”

“But I didn’t arrange it at all,” snapped the judge, a little piqued. “I wish you had the same belief in my abilities as a lawyer as you have as a friend! It was Dr. Smith who arranged it all.” With that he

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ent on and told in detail the doctor's plan, enlarging on its sure efficiency, its impossibility of interruption.

Lawrence listened attentively; his eyes glistened strangely, his lips quivering.

"And you won't see her before she goes?"

"Yes; maybe I'll see her this afternoon."

It would seem rather tactless to say where, but the old lawyer had made up his mind to go back to Brimfeld to attend the funeral. It would be well for the doctor to have some assistance, if necessary. He intended also to keep his eye and his clutches, too, on McKnight, if possible. He changed his tone, shifting his position to catch Lawrence's eye.

"And now for the rest of my report. I've seen Levelin—and—er—I thought it best—I gave him your story—before I asked for his——"

"Did you give him my message, judge?—because you didn't——"

"Hold on—wait a minute—just let's reconsider this idea of yours. You know what all this amounts to. You're running your own case, though I'm supposed to be your legal adviser. The position seems to be more or less of a sinecure; not a word of advice have you asked of me, and yet I'm supposed to have charge of your defense. Have you ever thought of the position that it puts me in?"

"I am very sorry, judge, but you see I don't wish to be 'defended.' Why should I?"

"So I see. But you don't wish to be convicted."

Lawrence Kellogg looked at him with clear eyes. "There is no danger of that. I'm not afraid of that, sir. When the truth is known——"

"Look here, Larry," broke in the judge impa-

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tiently, "when you face twelve men—there will be a third of them, most probably, who wouldn't know the truth when they saw it! Is it your opinion that the district attorney may quash further proceedings and let you go? If that's what you're counting on, then let me tell you: you were never more mistaken. I know Wilford Murger well; he doesn't believe in anything or anybody, including himself. He'll twist and contort things to suit his own ideas. As I said before, I saw Tevelin this morning and—just listen——"

"You know he's here now?" interrupted Lawrence. "He's somewhere with the district attorney. I suppose they wouldn't let me talk with him. . . . But he got a note from me—at least I hope he did."

"My stars! Larry Kellogg, I think you are stark, staring mad! You're wrong in the head, boy! He got a note from you! What are you talking about? I tell you I saw him at Brimfield, not five hours ago—You're mad——"

"And I saw him not five minutes ago. I don't think I'm mad, judge; but I can only see things one way. I would go mad, certainly, if I was forced to sit still and hear you arguing little points and denying this and that, and calling for proof!—demanding that I should display a nimble mind. Supposing it so happened that I could show an incontrovertible alibi? Do you think I'd take it and go out to slink through the rest of my life? No, sir! I ran away from the Unknown, impelled by I don't know what. I was mad then—yes, if you like to say it. If I'd ever sailed on that steamer I never would have reached the other side. . . . But—don't fear! I don't think of that any more; it's a coward's way out of trouble. I was suffering then;

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I'm not suffering now—that's all! Do you know how I feel? I feel as if most of what I had been had died, as if I was only half living, existing under the influence of some anæsthesia that still lets me think and act, without fear, without feeling."

"Well, of all strange human beings, you are the strangest," commented the judge, looking at him; "but you just said something that knocked me galley-west! How could you get a note to Tevelin?"

"I said 'I hoped I had.' They just moved me up here. Before that I was downstairs; I overheard two keepers saying that Tevelin was going to be placed in the empty cell next to mine and that they'd have to move me; I scribbled a note to him, and as I went by I threw it into the cell."

"Heavens and earth!" Judge Hollins gasped. "What did you say? Can you remember exactly what you wrote? You *have* done it now!"

"I wrote on a leaf from my notebook. I told him to tell the truth."

"Write it again—word for word."

Lawrence took out a pencil and scribbled a few lines, tearing out the leaf.

The judge read in silence, then he placed the paper in his pocket.

"I give up," he said hopelessly. "You don't know what you've done! I hope you wrote plainer than this—sure Tevelin can read?"

"Please come to my way of thinking," argued Lawrence, paying no attention to his counsel's attitude. "Don't you see that it simplifies things, that it has simplified them from the beginning? When Amy hears everything, she will understand, because there will be

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nothing more to be learned from any source; if it wasn't the truth, it might perplex her. She wouldn't understand at all. She would be wondering and asking; it would mean lies and unhappiness. It would mean death to me."

His client was hard to follow sometimes. The judge had recognized a mental change; the calm expression of something akin to fatalism worried him. It was plain that he was not altogether in a normal state; his lack of self-interest—his indifference was baffling.

Lawrence paid no attention to the anxious scrutiny, patiently waiting for some comment from the judge. Instead, the latter asked an abrupt question:

"Do you see the papers, Larry?"

"Not all of them. Don't you think we had better give them the truth, too?—Let everybody know just how things occurred."

"Not yet, not yet, my son," returned his counsel hastily. "Grant me that favor. All in good time, all in good time."

A doubt that had been in his mind was growing stronger. Had Lawrence really written to him that full account of the happenings of the night? Had he not, in the peculiar stress of mind under which he had been laboring, imagined it? Perhaps Enoch Walker was right—maybe he *had* posted all the letters that had been given him.

But the strangest thing of this whole strange interview was that Tevelin's story was still unrepeated; it had been sidetracked by Lawrence's lack of apparent interest. The judge came to it at last, after this fashion:

"I suppose you'd like to hear what Tevelin had

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to say to me, now we've gone through everything else; couldn't you?"

"What was it—was it of any moment?"

"Was it of any moment?" repeated the judge. "Maybe you'll think so when you hear it."

He plunged into the story, refreshing his mind now and then by some notes that he had scribbled on the back of some foreclosure papers. "And that," he said, as he finished, "is what you handed to the prosecution. It doesn't make any matter whether these things are so or not; you've given Murger the handle that he wanted."

"It goes right in with the story that I'd have to tell myself," said Lawrence slowly; "every word of it. Don't you see how it bears me out in what I told you? Mr. Murger has nothing but the facts to submit now."

"Oh, he'll submit them all right!—properly decorated and embroidered. Oh, he's no fool when it comes to spellbinding a jury. My shining stars! This whole thing is like—like—giving the answer and then asking the question. Of course they'll indict you. I have been prepared for it right along. And there'll be a trial—I was sure of that, or I'd have asked for a commission to be appointed to inquire into your condition of mind. Is that outspoken enough to suit? You have been wanting the truth. I'm afraid there's a hard ordeal ahead of you, my son, before we finish."

Lawrence Kellogg surveyed the blank walls of the cell. There was not a trace of irritation or despair on his face. He seemed to accept the judge's words as he had accepted everything, showing his placidity at the course of fate.

"We will have to face it—that's all," he said slowly.

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“But, thank God, Amy won’t be here! I don’t care much about anything else.” His soul was comforted: Amy was safe out of it, for a time at least, if not altogether. In utter ignorance of what had actually befallen, she would soon be far away from any danger of being drawn into the web in which he was entangled. He felt a sense of admiring gratitude to Dr. Smith, who had so unexpectedly come to the rescue. He didn’t reason over it any more than he had reasoned over what might have become of the luggage that had been left in his stateroom on the *Celtic*. What was going to happen elsewhere had nothing to do with him here. He would make no experiments or excursions with Fancy. Just to face the day as it came was all there was left.

His old friend turned to him and stole an arm about his shoulder, as he had so often done in the hours of their intimacy.

“Larry,” he said, “you must rouse yourself—keep up your heart.”

“I’ll meet anything bravely enough. . . . The only trouble is that I don’t seem to care.”

“That’s just it!” cried the judge. “But I do; don’t you see I must?” He bethought him of the paper in his pocket and drew it out, spreading it on the rough blanket. “You see what we have to expect,” he said.

As Lawrence read, his face grew ashen; a fit of trembling seized him. . . . “My God!” he groaned. “You don’t think she’ll see this!” He crumpled the paper up and threw it on the floor. All at once he bent forward, his forehead on his folded arms that rested on his knees. . . . At last he raised himself.

“You’ve been very patient with me, judge,” he said.

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"I don't know what I'd have done if I hadn't had you to turn to. But listen! You remember, that when I first told you all that happened, I expressed a doubt—it was in the letter that I wrote you. It was a doubt as to how Frank Bellwood really died."

"What!" The judge jumped to his feet in fright, looking down at the man beside him in an astonishment that left him bereft of words.

"Oh, I knew he was dead; I was sure of that. But don't you see, he always—I had no time to make examination."

The judge's voice almost croaked. "Why, man, the back of his head was crushed in! . . . You must have—didn't you say you flung him back against the stones?"

The effect of this was absolutely unexpected. Lawrence slipped from the cot to the tile floor. Kneeling there, he buried his face against the coverlet. His old friend bent down beside him in a vain attempt to comfort.

For a long time the judge sat there, saying nothing, waiting for the storm to pass, until slowly this man he loved conquered the long, torturing breaths and submitted to be helped to his feet again.

"Don't dwell on it, Larry, my boy—don't dwell on it! It can't do you any good. I didn't mean to be so brutal. . . . You just now said your courage was all right; you'll have to call upon it often, lad—many times in what's before you."

Lawrence replied to the grasp of the firm, large hand. "It's all over, judge," he said. "You see, I wasn't sure—I wasn't sure—and I hardly dared to ask. . . . Don't fear again for me."



## CHAPTER XXIV

### A REVIEW OF EVIDENCE

**S**ORRY I can't oblige you. It's quite impossible." Mr. Wilford Murger kept opening and shutting the inkstand with the end of his pen. Mr. McKnight sat opposite him on the edge of the big, flat desk, and from his appearance it was evident that he was somewhat angered.

"Why, look here! Mr. District Attorney," he said, leaning forward on his elbow, "you might give me permission just to have a talk with this man. I will submit to you any story I may make out of it—I give you my word that I won't change a line. We've helped you make your case so far, you can't deny that. It was Colson who thought of measuring the hoof prints, and who found out that Kellogg's horse had lost a shoe off the left fore foot. And then I found the marks of clay and blue gravel on the bottom of the buggy and on the foot scraper at Kellogg's house."

"That isn't so important now as it might have been. I've got something stronger than circumstantial evidence to go on."

McKnight's eyes brightened. Tevelin had turned state's evidence! He jumped at once to the right conclusion. But he was clever enough not to show

## *A REVIEW OF EVIDENCE*

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it at the moment; he perceived Murger, himself, had noticed the slip he had made. "I've been working for your side of the case all along," he continued in his obstinate pleading, "and I'm going to help you nail this fellow down. You know the town is divided into two camps—Kellogg seems to have a good many friends. . . . Just give me a note and let me have a talk with Tevelin."

"Can't do it," replied the district attorney. "You may be a clever amateur detective, but I know my business."

"But, then, let me interview *you*," went on Mr. McKnight. "You can tell me just so much or just so little, as you want to. I've found out something more that may be of use to you, that maybe you haven't heard—and something else that probably you think I don't know at all!"

"Is this case going to be tried in the newspapers or in a court of law?" asked the district attorney somewhat arrogantly. "Probably you'd like to take my place here and manage matters."

Mr. McKnight laughed. "Well, I could give you a pointer that would be well worth following." He studied Mr. Murger's red face attentively. "You will find it in every dime novel and melodrama ever written or produced."

Murger closed the inkstand with a snap. "I don't object to receiving any 'pointers,'" he said, "and when the proper time comes——"

"Seems to me you are letting some of the proper time slip by you now," suggested Mr. McKnight. "I'll give you my pointer gratis. It may suggest something——" He spoke with mock intensity. "'There's

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*a woman* in this somewhere!’” He laughed. “That may be moldy, but it’s the proper cue.”

“There always is in affairs of this kind,” returned Mr. Murger. Then, seeing that his visitor had laughed again, he added: “And that reply is about as moth-eaten as your suggestion.”

“Well, let me go a little farther. . . . Did you know that the minister used to meet this Mrs. Rice and go automobiling with her? That he had been with her the day she was killed? She seems to have been rather—er—attractive—eh, what?”

Mr. Murger remained silent.

“Perhaps you knew that,” continued the reporter, “and perhaps you didn’t. You must have known that Dr. Kellogg was a constant visitor at her house, that he and Bellwood had quarreled—had become bitter enemies. I’ve got that on good authority. You ask Brower, who lives next door to the rectory, what he heard one night.”

“Well, is *that* all you’re going to tell me?” This was news to the district attorney. But he covered his surprise.

“No; it wasn’t what I was going to tell at all! You don’t seem to be receptive just now. But a question—Are you following up the clew of the attempted robbery at the cemetery?”

“Now I’m not going to tell you all my plans or everything I’m doing, Mr. McKnight.” Mr. Murger was more than ruffled. “I suppose you will go ahead and write what you please—that goes without saying. But I’m not going to give my hand away, as I said before. Why don’t you go and interview the prisoner?—you may get something out of *him*.”

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“Well,” said Mr. McKnight, “I got a straight statement from his attorney.”

“What was that?” Mr. Murger pricked up his ears.

“He told me that nobody was so anxious to have the truth given out about this affair as was his client. I will give you something to think over. What if he directed Tevelin to make this confession, eh? That’s what *I’d* have advised him to do.”

“Did he retain you as counsel? If not, maybe he’s looking for a press agent. Who said anything about a confession?”

Mr. McKnight rose and stretched himself. “Oh, well!” said he; “forget it—but remember this: a newspaper man may have a good deal of weight.”

“You’ve got that all right!” grinned Mr. Murger, glancing over the reporter’s burly figure, and making what he thought to be a home thrust. “Come in in the morning—I may have something to tell you then.”

“All right!” smiled McKnight, striking a match on the sole of his foot and lighting a cigarette. “I may have something to tell you, too. . . . You find out who was with Kellogg the day the big dam was blown up! Look up Murray, driver of Storr’s butcher wagon. There’s a hint for you—I may bring you another tomorrow.”

“Bring it along,” said the district attorney, with an attempt to be offhand and pleasant. He had not forgotten his chagrin at that parting with the widow at the Country Club. He turned and halted the reporter with a quick gesture. “Of course, I know who Kellogg was with that day,” he blurted, a sudden change in his tone. “He was with Mrs. Rice.”

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The reporter whistled.

"You're barking up the wrong tree," he laughed. "Get wise—get wise." With that he closed the door.

As soon as his visitor had left, Mr. Murger pushed back from the desk. Although puzzled, he rather congratulated himself that he had had the best of the interview. The blowing up of the dam had ushered in his tenure of office and made him feel his importance. But this was a bigger case, and he did not wish any small thunders to be stolen. One thing worried him not a little: Tevelin's sudden change of heart. He had proclaimed his ignorance and innocence of any knowledge or guilt, until suddenly—under no immediate pressure—he had divulged everything! The offer of clemency extended to him as a reward had been entirely voluntary on the district attorney's part, and he now regretted it. Mr. Murger wished, not only to win this fight because it had come in the direct line of his office-holding position, but he longed to humble his old enemy, and he harbored a revengeful feeling that was purely personal against the prisoner. Even if this case had amounted to nothing, he would have felt gratified that he had given a man, who had once bested him, some trouble and annoyance. In view of the damning testimony, it would have been most strange for Judge Hollins to have suggested the confession. What did McKnight mean? Then this tale of a quarrel between the minister and the accused—how about it? He had facts enough for the grand jury. Nevertheless the hint of undivulged evidence—held out to him as a bait—increased his irritation. The attempted breaking into the Rice mausoleum he had as yet paid little heed to. The

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urrent story of the gems and the diamond tiara had  
ot into the papers and had been enough to attract  
e attention of the local blacklegs; the district attorney  
ad, previous to Tevelin's sending for him, suspected  
im. The county detective force was working upon  
me clews at Antioch that might lead somewhere. But  
ow could a man like Dr. Kellogg be associated in any  
ay with those to whom the suspicion of robbery  
ointed? What was the Rev. Bellwood doing there at  
hat hour of night?

Mr. Murger, after his long self-communion at the  
indow, returned to his desk, and had just seated him-  
self when his assistant, young Wilcox, thrust his head  
1 from the outer office.

"Bill Gould's out here—wants to see you," he said  
amiliarly, and in a few minutes the new sheriff, making  
very evident effort at a professional deportment, en-  
tered and closed the door firmly behind him.

"We caught them fellows who was implicated in  
he attempted robbery at the cemetery," he announced  
usually. "Picked them up just as they were jumping  
freight at the A. W. and O. yard."

"Who are they?"

"Oh, two young toughs. When they found out  
that they was wanted for they was kinder scared; but  
we got 'em talking, and when they opened up, we got  
the whole story."

Mr. Murger was all attention now. "Did either  
of them know Dr. Kellogg?"

"Nope, but——"

"Well, did they know Bellwood?"

"No, they said they didn't. But one of them knew  
'at Tevelin and had talked to him up at Chase's Road

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House. They claim that everybody was talking about the jewels that were there at the Rice vault on the——”

“Never mind that,” Mr. Murger interrupted. “Go on.”

“And so they got to thinkin’ of it, and when they’d drunk enough whisky to make ’em brave, they walked in toward Brimfield until they came to the cemetery. They claim that they didn’t intend to commit no robbery, but just went to have a look, and when they got there they found the pick and crowbar that the workmen left, and just took a few cracks at the lock to see if it would open. One of them took off his coat and rolled it up against the bolt so they wouldn’t make any noise while workin’ at it. First thing they know, a man in a long coat jumps out at them and they ran. It’s a clear case of attempted——”

“Pshaw!” said the district attorney. “That doesn’t connect them with the murder or tell me what Kellogg and Bellwood were doing there at that hour of night.”

The sheriff was rather disconcerted at the lack of interest his news had excited. “No,” he said. “I suppose that’s another matter.”

The district attorney repeated his words. “Another matter entirely, sheriff. . . . But I’ll give you a bit of news. Tevelin’s told the whole story and we got enough to insure trial.”

Mr. Gould made no effort now to conceal his excitement, but his curiosity was not to be rewarded on the spot.

“What did he say?”

“Well—I can’t go into it now; all I can say is, you brought back the right man. I want to prove he drove

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Bellwood to the cemetery. Couldn't help me there, could you?"

"Don't seem as if I could; got any clews?"

"Well, nothing definite; but that doesn't alter the fact we've got him. . . . Now if you'll excuse me, sheriff, I've got a lot of work to do. I'll go over everything with you later; you won't be kept in the dark."

"You won't tell me now?"

"I told you I hadn't time; it's quite a long story, and——"

"Well, I'll be ——" Mr. Gould stamped through the door, red-faced and angry.

It was rather foolish of Mr. Murger to antagonize his followers at this time, but in his self-conceit he was reckless. He was so used to fishing on both sides of the stream that he suspected most people of the same thing. Never had he succeeded in keeping either a colleague or a partner! After Mr. Gould had closed the door with unnecessary loudness, the district attorney sat there thinking. The arrest of the two young toughs was a small matter; so far as he could see, it had no bearing. The only thing he would have to go on was the unsupported testimony of a man who, by his own confession, was at least an accessory after the fact, and who could now claim immunity. The district attorney had acted on his own initiative from the beginning. The arrest of Tevelin, and the subsequent apprehending of Lawrence Kellogg, had been mere ventures founded on his own suspicions—ventures that Mr. Murger had come to regard, later, as inspirations of his own born genius. But how wonderfully clever he had been, thought the district attorney; and, having led himself into a mood of self-



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congratulation, he stepped to the door and called in his assistant from the outer office.

Charlie Wilcox was a bright-faced young man of four-and-twenty, of engaging manners, bright cheeks, and a waving pompadour. In common with his own immediate family and the School Board trustees, Charlie, from his youth up, had rather fancied his future, and having been admitted to the Bar he regarded his almost immediate appointment to the district attorney's office as a stepping-stone to coming greatness.

"Mr. Wilcox," began the district attorney—it had been "Charlie" before the latter had entered his office—"you went to the minister's funeral the other day—I'm sorry now I didn't go myself, but I couldn't. Was Judge Hollins there?"

"Yes, he sat back in the church with McKnight, the reporter. They seem to be getting pretty thick. Say! But there was a crowd!"

"You didn't get a chance to speak with Mrs. Bellwood, did you? Used to be in her Sunday-school class—know her pretty well, eh?" Mr. Murger was slightly sneering, but his assistant ignored it.

"No, I didn't see anybody speak to her. She wore a heavy veil and had hold of Dr. Smith's arm most of the time. I felt awful sorry for her. I guess Dr. Smith has begun to lay his pipes already."

Mr. Murger endeavored at least to look "wise" as the reporter had advised him. "Had you heard of any quarrel between Kellogg and the minister? There had been, you know."

"Well, Doc Kellogg had quit attending to him and stopped going there altogether. You know he and Mrs.

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Bellwood was pretty spongy once. I remember when I was a kid they was reported engaged."

"I'm afraid," said the district attorney, "that we'll have to subpoena Mrs. Bellwood. She may be able to give us a little light where we need it. You make out the papers and serve 'em, too."

"You're a bit late, I guess. Judge Hollins as much as told me that she was going to appear on his side of the case."

"Humph," grunted the district attorney; "that puts another face on the matter, doesn't it?"

"It sure does—Oh!—just as Mrs. Bellwood and Dr. Smith drove off I saw the judge go up and talk with them. She handed him a letter or something. I forgot to tell you that. They said round town this morning that the whole family have gone off somewheres for a little while. Don't blame them. I suppose the reporters have been worrying round there, too."

"Charlie," said Mr. Murger, relapsing into the familiar term, "I want you to make out a subpoena for Peter Brower, the hardware man. Lives next door to the rectory, doesn't he?" Wilcox nodded. "And by the way, Charlie, if I were you I'd just cultivate that McKnight person a little bit. He seems to know something, or thinks he does. It might be worth while."

"Seems to be a clever sort of fellow," responded Mr. Wilcox. "I thought he was trying to cultivate you."

Murger laughed. "I don't think we get on very well," he said. "But we don't want him to go to the other side. You know a newspaper man can have a good deal of weight! And I not only want an indict-

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ment, but I want a conviction in this case. It's *your* opportunity as well as mine."

The assistant district attorney smiled. Trust him for missing his opportunity! "McKnight told me he was going round to the jail to see Leary, as he went through the office," he volunteered.

Mr. Murger started with an oath. "Get a move on you," he said quickly. "Jump round and see Leary; tell him not to let anybody talk with Tevelin on any account!"

"Why, Judge Hollins saw him at Brimfield—was with him over an hour."

"The devil he did! Before Tevelin sent for me?"

"Yes, sure; didn't you know that? Didn't Gould tell you?"

"Gould's a damn fool!" retorted Mr. Murger. "Hold on! I guess I'll go and see Leary myself—and Tevelin, too," he added.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE SWING OF THE PENDULUM

**M**R. MURGER gathered up some notes and papers, put them in his pocket, and, with a look round him, closed the door of the office. It was his first week in the new roomy quarters that were to be his during his term of office. They were just finished. The trial was the first to be held in the court room of the new building. As he turned into the corridor of the jail from traversing the long, covered causeway, he glanced ahead of him and slowed his footsteps. At the foot of the iron staircase was Judge Hollins, just opening the door to pass out on his way to the gate! The district attorney's anger rose against both the prisoner and his counsel; they had been most probably in conference. Supposing Tevelin had lied to him? What if every move had been under the judge's control! His attitude had been, at best, but a surly acquiescence to a position seemingly forced upon him against his will. Now, by hook or crook, Mr. Murger determined to win out. If he could not prove premeditation on the part of the accused, there were lesser degrees of crimes that were akin to murder. Anything would be better than the acknowledgment of having been played into a position that conduced to his own complete defeat! He saw the judge standing there on the doorstep; he paused

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again and swore softly to himself. Somebody was with him. Yes! there was his old adversary talking to the very man whose suggestion of assistance he had so curtly disdained to listen to but a short time ago! The reporter was smiling at something the judge had said. The door had swung to slowly. It was closed all but a crack. Mr. Murger stole on tiptoe down the iron staircase.

"Then you don't know where Mrs. Bellwood is, judge?" Mr. McKnight was saying. "I can give you my word that I am not responsible altogether for the way they've treated this thing down at the office. You see, they've got a certain policy that they think pays; it's business with them. The people like to have things dished up that way. But of course there's a woman in it."

"Well, it's a mean policy, a dirty business, and a nasty dish," remarked the judge, paying no attention to the end of McKnight's speech.

"Granted—freely admitted. I don't lay claim to the fact that I am proud to be connected with it—I'm not! But I try to do my job in just as clean a way as I can. If I knew of any quarterly review or fire-side weekly that would pay me the same money, I'd wash my hands and be respectable the rest of my life. I know most people think we are dirty dogs, but we're not—all of us. And let me tell you this, sir"—somehow the judge always secured this tribute of respect from younger men—"let me tell you this: I'm slowly coming to the conviction that your man is innocent. I didn't think so at the start-off. Now I'm perfectly open to be convinced. Haven't you anything to tell me?"

The judge looked at him and spoke with a kindly gruffness. "Well, he thinks he is, and so do I. And if you want me to go further, I will add that I firmly

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believe the learned district attorney has his doubts in the matter. You go for *him*."

"But, judge, you haven't answered my question. Do you know Mrs. Bellwood's whereabouts? Can you tell me where she is?"

"My boy," replied the judge, "I give you my word of honor that I haven't the least idea where she is, within a hundred miles. If she's wanted as a witness, she'll be on hand. Does that satisfy you?" He spoke slowly and turned to go.

Suddenly he was aware that McKnight was standing there with his hand outstretched. . . . "Well, good-by," he was saying. "I have taken a shine to you, judge, and I'd like to help you. I think I'll go see Murger. He'd like to find out where Mrs. Bellwood is, too—eh, wouldn't he?"

The old gentleman had kept hold of his elbow. "If he knows, and tells you," he said, "come to me and I'll give you a letter of introduction. Now be good, and keep my picture out of the papers."

With that they parted.

Mr. Murger swore again. The reporter's hints and Charlie Wilcox's information grew luminous suddenly. The "woman in the case" was the murdered man's wife! But would they dare put her on the stand? There it was! He must get hold of her! Wait a minute! Who was it told him to look up the driver of Storr's butcher wagon? Why, McKnight, of course!

Monday came, and before evening Murger's stock had risen; the friends of the accused man were correspondingly depressed. Lawrence Kellogg would have to stand a trial! Before the end of the week the summonses were out for jurymen.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE TRIAL

**B**RIMFIELD had trooped to the county seat. All Antioch was excited. Rows of country wagons filled the street in front of the new Four Courts. The ornate court room, that still smelled of paint and varnish, was crowded; every seat had been taken since early in the morning, many people had been turned away.

Ten o'clock. The jurymen were in their seats; the judge entered slowly and settled himself in his chair, gathering the folds of his silk gown around him. The clerk of the court had mouthed the preliminary call for order and silence. The trial had begun.

The prosecuting attorney rose, but few eyes were on him; all were watching the prisoner seated at the corner of the table near his counsel. His face was pale, but his head and shoulders were back in the old way that marked him. The women in the court room fell to nudging and whispering. The reporters at their table waiting, pencil in hand, were eager for the word to start in competition. An artist, sent from New York by a rival yellow journal to Mr. McKnight's, had begun already on his thumb-nail sketches.

The prosecutor was speaking now.

He opened with a reference to his painful duty,

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emphasizing the fact of the high social standing in the community of both the murdered man and the accused. He stated that there was much mystery surrounding the affair, but, if the jury would follow the testimony of the witnesses that would be called, they could not help but reach the conclusion that a foul crime had been committed. Premeditation, he went on to state, was necessarily not the matter of a day or hour; it might mean the premeditation of a minute. Men who had once been closest friends might become the bitterest enemies and few might hear of it. This would be shown to be so in the present case. Innocent men did not run away and try to sail to foreign countries! Motive was often hard to prove, but when the case was finished he did not doubt that the motive would be clear to every mind. And leaving the jury attentive under the spell of this cryptic utterance, Mr. Murger called his first witness—Dr. Peyton of the sanitarium.

He stated that the minister had been suffering from a nervous breakdown—excessive use of drugs—and had been for two days a patient under his care. Word had been brought to him on the evening of Tuesday, the 17th, that the Rev. Bellwood was missing from his room and could not be found about the buildings or the grounds. Dr. Peyton said that he had attended the inquest and testified to the manner of Bellwood's death—the skull crushed by a heavy blow!

Judge Hollins waived cross-examination.

One of the assistants at the sanitarium followed. He contributed little, merely describing what he supposed to be the minister's method of escape, thereby disclosing that he was more or less in confinement. The heavy overcoat and fur cap that had been found on



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the body had been taken from a closet down the hallway and were his. There was mention made of the time that the absence was first noted, and the witness was excused.

Judge Hollins had no questions to ask; all this was of no importance.

Enoch Walker was the next witness called. In a few minutes the hired man had seated himself in the witness chair and had answered the preliminary questions. He was ill at ease and plainly frightened. He testified as to the hour that Kellogg's horse had been taken from the stable, but he could not tell at what time it was returned, as the doctor had unharnessed the horse himself.

The prosecuting attorney asked him some questions in regard to the happenings of the next day. It was brought out that his employer had bade good-by to him as if nothing unusual had occurred. He had given him some letters to mail—among others one to Judge Hollins. He had also asked him to see the judge upon his return.

Mr. Murger seemed satisfied and turned the witness over for cross-examination.

The counsel for the defense had a few questions to ask of Enoch. He had just testified that Dr. Kellogg had given him some letters for mailing, on Wednesday morning, the 18th. Had he gone directly to the post office? Not directly; he had ridden to the village with the driver of Storr's butcher wagon. Would he swear that he posted all the letters? The judge particularly recalled to his memory that there might have been a large envelope. Enoch faltered. He remembered this "big letter," but he would not swear positively.

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He thought he had posted them. Much relieved, he was let go.

One or two witnesses more were then called by the prosecution, who swore to seeing Bellwood on the Brimfield streets late in the evening on the 17th. They had noticed his strange attire—the ear tabs tied beneath his chin—and had remarked upon it. No questions were asked of them by the defense.

A man named Norton, a carpenter living at Brimfield, was next called. He testified to meeting Bellwood walking up the hill from Brimfield to the cemetery on Tuesday night. He spoke to him, but had received no answer. Just a few minutes afterwards he had met Dr. Kellogg driving up the hill in a buggy; he had got a look at his face in the moonlight and had wished him “good evening.” The horse was being driven very slowly, as if the doctor did not wish to overtake the man ahead of him too quickly; Mr. Norton judged they would “just about meet” at the cemetery gates.

“No cross-examination,” said the judge. “I have nothing to ask.”

“Bernard McCutcheon,” called the prosecutor.

Judge Hollins rose slowly and turned to the district attorney, at the same time halting Mr. McCutcheon with a polite wave of the hand.

“In order to save time,” he began, “if any further testimony is to be given here to prove that Dr. Kellogg was at the cemetery on this night in question, it is admitted by the defense. He was there, his horse was tied in the bushes by the roadside, he afterwards led the buggy through the cemetery gates, it was his horse blanket that was found in the driveway. I merely

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state this," concluded the judge, as he sat down again, "in order that the time of the court might not be taken up unnecessarily."

The district attorney frowned, and then attempted to hide it. He cast a puzzled, interrogative look at the counsel for the defense, and, bending over, began to confer with his assistant, nervously sorting some notes. The mayor of Kenton Falls, who was sitting inside the rail, appeared somewhat disappointed at not being called to the witness chair.

There was a dead silence in the court room. The people in the seats began to crane their necks and look at the decorations. Mr. Murger at last straightened himself and called a name. . . .

"Charles Murray."

A thin-faced, sparse-haired individual was following the court officer down the aisle. Judge Hollins watched his advance with a curious expression. Never to his recollection had he ever seen the man before. Mr. Murger, bending over, was still whispering to Charlie Wilcox.

As he stepped into the railed space, the witness, just summoned, did a curious thing. He stopped, and, fumbling in his pocket, produced a large envelope and handed it to Judge Hollins across the table. Mr. Murger, still intent upon his notes, did not observe it, nor did his assistant. But the whole proceeding had been viewed by the court room, and twelve pairs of eyes from the jury box. The court attendant had been somewhat surprised at the action, and before Mr. Murray had time to speak a word, hustled him on toward the witness chair.

Judge Hollins, taken by surprise, looked at the large

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envelope. It was stained, crumpled, stamped, and sealed with a dab of sealing wax and addressed to him in Lawrence Kellogg's writing. He cast a glance at his client, who had suddenly leaned forward. His manner showed an intense, subdued excitement; although sitting at his elbow, the judge said nothing to him—only, all at once, his hand stole out and caught his arm in a restraining and reassuring grasp. Then he placed the packet in the breast of his coat and looked at the district attorney, whose witness was waiting for him. Mr. Murger had shuffled the notes into a compact bundle and, after a final glance at them, nodded to the clerk of the court.

Mr. Murray, evidently overcome by surprise at his own most unusual call to prominence, made oath as to his age and birthplace. He had resided for six months in Brimfield, and was employed by Storr, the butcher, and drove his delivery wagon.

Mr. Murger continued with his questions in a loud tone of voice.

“Do you know the prisoner?”

Mr. Murray started. “I know Dr. Kellogg,” he said. “But I never spoke to him—only once.”

“Ah, when was that?”

“The day of the blowing up of the dam. He telephoned in from the power house and saved the lives——”

“We don't have to go into that, Mr. Murray. Was Dr. Kellogg alone on this occasion?” The district attorney spoke eagerly. Here was the first chance to bring in Mrs. Bellwood's name and to suggest the missing motive.

Judge Hollins rose quickly to his feet. “I object, your Honor; this has nothing to do with the case. I am

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willing to admit that my client saved the lives of the people at the Esterbrook Mill on this occasion; but it was some time prior to the happening that led to this present trial and I don't see what it has to do with it at all."

"The objection is sustained," replied the Court with a nod in Judge Hollins's direction.

"He was with Fletcher Timms, the constable—" put in the witness, not knowing the reason for the interruption, "and——"

It was Judge Porter who interrupted now and spoke quickly, looking over his glasses. "You need not go on with that, Mr. Murray," he said, and then, turning to Mr. Murger, he said pleasantly, but finally: "Please confine yourself, Mr. District Attorney, to matters that are relevant."

Mr. Murger shrugged his shoulders as if to convey unwilling acquiescence to authority. He began on another tack. "Do you know the prisoner's counsel?"

"Do you mean the gentleman I just give the letter to?"

Mr. Murger appeared puzzled. He glanced quickly over his shoulder at Charlie Wilcox and then, turning, repeated the witness's last words. . . . "The gentleman you just gave the letter to? What letter—when?"

"A letter I found in the seat of the wagon. It was addressed to him; I give it to him just this minute here."

What was all this leading to? What did it mean? His assistant, the judge, the jury, and the whole court room were waiting in breathless interest.

"You'll have to explain yourself, Mr. Murray;

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you're talking in riddles. I don't exactly follow. Where did you get this letter?"

"I told you I found it in the old seat of the wagon. I found it this morning. It was addressed to Mr. Hollins, so I give it to him."

The district attorney appeared to wake up suddenly.

"Where did you keep this seat of the wagon?" The sentence was fairly hurled at the witness's head.

"I didn't keep it at all, sir. I'd throwd it away. I just went to look for it this morning. It was on a pile of rubbish to be burned."

Mr. Murger threw up both hands in a gesture, as if he appealed to the gods at large. "That will do," he said, and turning: "Has the counsel for the defense any questions to ask? I will state that I wish to recall this witness in rebuttal. . . . Go on with him!"

Judge Hollins rose. "On Wednesday, the 18th"—he began slowly—"not very long ago, you may remember it—did Enoch Walker—or, by the way, you know Enoch Walker, do you not?"

"I've known him ever since I came to Brimfield. He works for Dr. Kellogg—that is, he did."

"Yes. Did Enoch Walker ride in with you to Brimfield from Dr. Kellogg's place on your delivery wagon?"

"Yes, sir; let's see—I think it was of a Wednesday—yes, the 18th—the day the horse was shod."

The witness was entirely self-possessed. He seemed to forget that everyone was hanging on his words.

"Where did you go?"

"We drove to the post office, sir. I let him out  
alone."

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"He had some letters, then? Did he have them in his hand?"

"No, sir; he put them on the seat and sat on them. Perhaps——"

"Never mind that—just answer. The leather of the seat was new? Was it a new seat?"

"No, sir, the old one, ripped straight down the middle. It was the seat I found the letter in. That's how it must—I think that's how it must——"

"Never mind thinking just now. You see, we all are thinking, too. Just one more question: Did anyone tell you to look for this letter?"

"No—no, sir. I was looking for some stuff to put in the seat for the other cart, and there it was under the flap where it had been torn."

"You had no idea it was there until this morning—and no idea that you would be called to answer any of these questions?"

"No idea—not even a moment ago."

"That will do, Mr. Murray. You may step down."

"Where shall I go?" Bewildered at the whole occurrence, the witness looked about him. Judge Hollins gazed at him with kindly eyes. Beneath his breath he was muttering: "God bless you, lad! You can go straight to heaven, where I think you came from." But the court officer was beckoning, as he held open the swinging gate, and Mr. Murray disappeared in the crowd.

The counsel for the defense could scarcely conceal the agitation produced by his sense of coming triumph. Oh, if Mr. Murger would only make the fatal blunder! He took the much-talked-of letter from the breast of his coat, turned it over without reading it, in full sight

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of the court room, and replaced it. Oh, how he longed to tear it open! But now was not the time. Mr. Murger was once more whispering in his assistant's ear. Young Wilcox was drawing meaningless geometrical figures on the blotter as he listened.

"What do you suppose was in the paper that was delivered to this confounded old fox in the court room just now?"

"Search me!" replied his assistant. "Maybe it was Kellogg's confession."

Mr. Murger swore so harshly that Wilcox jumped.

"What are we going to do? What do you think's inside of it?"

"Dunno," replied Mr. Wilcox vaguely. "Ask him. Couldn't you bring it in somehow?"

"Looks kind of phony to me. Hardly dare. . . . He hasn't opened it."

"Maybe he's scared to. . . . Better go on and see what happens."

Mr. Murger stepped out again and summoned the next witness, after a reference to the notes.

Peter Brower advanced to the witness chair. His appearance was a surprise to the defense. He was a little man, with ferrety black eyes and wisp of pointed beard. He swore he kept a hardware store at Brimfield and lived next to the rectory. The extension of his house was close to the rectory windows—not more than twenty feet, only separated by a row of evergreens. On Monday night—he fixed the date exactly, October 2d—he had been sitting up late, when he heard a commotion next door; people seemed to be coming and going. He could see shadows on the window shade opposite. Judge Hollins had come to his house and asked to use the



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telephone. He had called up Dr. Kellogg's number. The instrument was in a closet and the door had been shut; he did not overhear the message. The judge had left shortly. Long after midnight he heard a voice he recognized as the minister's cry out in the following words: "Tell him to go!—He'd like to see me dead!" There was the sound of a struggle, and another voice that he swore was Dr. Kellogg's replied: "I'll hold him.—Take your hands off me, Frank!" He was still listening at the window and heard other voices and a groaning, muttering sound. After a while all this had ceased; but he still watched and saw Dr. Lawrence Kellogg leave the rectory early in the morning.

Mr. Murger had him repeat some of the words of his testimony a number of times. He did not change them. After this night, he volunteered, Dr. Kellogg, who had before been a constant visitor, never came to the rectory.

This testimony produced a profound sensation. It almost came within the rule that conversations to be admissible must be repeated in their entirety, but no objections had been interposed. Judge Hollins and his client sat there watching the witness without the exchange of a glance. Now came the old lawyer's turn at last.

How stern that musical voice could be when emergency required! He asked if the witness could tell what time it was he had knocked on the door and asked permission to use the telephone. Mr. Brower gave it to a minute. Then the counsel for the defense inquired if he had seen anyone else there at the rectory that evening. Yes, Mr. Brower had seen Dr. Rublee enter and also the judge. When the latter had left the second

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time, he could not state. No, he could not swear to whom the minister's words had been addressed. He recognized Mrs. Bellwood's voice and he was sure—yes, sure, Dr. Kellogg's. But to this, when pinned down to it, he would not now make oath. Yes, he had leaned far out of the window in order to hear better. Maybe he had tried to see into the room, but the pine branches had interfered. How was he so certain that it was Dr. Kellogg who had left the house? He knew him by his height and figure as he had gone down the walk to the gate. It was here that the judge began to mix Mr. Brower up a little, as to entrances and departures. Mr. Brower became suddenly rattled and began to perspire freely. He had not noticed several things, it appeared; the judge's second departure, for instance. It was evident that the witness was most uncomfortable; he mopped his forehead frequently, and his high, squeaky voice faltered and shook. At last he recanted entirely—he would not be positive that it was Dr. Kellogg. The judge had picked up his soft, black hat. "Did the man you saw wear a hat like this?" he asked. Mr. Brower was not sure—he might have. No, he had not heard that Dr. Kellogg had left Brimfield for New York and had been gone two weeks. He acknowledged that this might account for his not being seen at the rectory. The old lawyer smiled contemptuously as he tossed the hat down again and let him go. There was hardly a man in the jury who had not recognized the black sombrero. Nevertheless, the import of Mr. Brower's testimony had suggested the idea of some trouble between the murdered man and the accused, and though the weight of his testimony had been lessened, it still remained.

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Mr. Murger had been making copious additions to his notes during the cross-examination. His brows were knitted, and his face redder than ever. As he stood up, lounging along the edge of the jury box, as was his fashion, the hand behind his back was clinched so hard that the cords in his wrist showed plainly and the papers were crumpled in his fingers. The promised sensation was about to begin! But Mr. Murger paused. He was tempted—sorely tempted—to put Judge Hollins on the stand! He could not make up his mind. He crossed to the table again and bent in whispered consultation with young Wilcox, who appeared flushed and somewhat bothered. It was rather late in the day, he thought, to be called upon for any suggestions; but he saw that his chief was afraid the case was fading. Nothing yet had been heard from the subpoena servers who were searching for Mrs. Bellwood. She had disappeared off the face of the earth, apparently. The defense must have hidden her. The unexpected acknowledgment of Lawrence Kellogg's presence at the cemetery by the counsel had cut the prosecution out of two or three minor witnesses; and the more he could place on the stand, the stronger would be his case—was Mr. Murger's reasoning. The assistant district attorney could offer no suggestions, so the trump card had to be played immediately. Patrick Tevelin's name was called.

As he advanced to the witness stand he was plainly agitated. Not once did he cast a glance in the direction of the prisoner, whose steady eyes were on him. He was duly sworn. For some reason Mr. Tevelin's perturbation affected his utterance—his west-of-Ireland brogue seemed to be untempered by contact with his recently

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adopted country. Several times he was requested to repeat, and at this Mr. Tevelin's fear seemed changed to irritation. In response to Mr. Murger's admonition to "speak up louder, so the jury can hear you," he shot a glance at the district attorney that bordered on defiance; but his words came clearer. His story was simple: He had been drinking all day, but was not very drunk; at least, he was sober enough to remember all that had occurred. He had left Chase's Road House on foot, with a bottle of whisky that he had purchased there—yes, the bartender had written his name on it, and the date. It had been kept for him. Going by the cemetery, he had recalled the story of Mrs. Rice and the jewels—one or two rough characters had asked him about this in Chase's barroom—perhaps what they had said, he admitted, had been enough to excite his suspicions. At all events, he had turned off at the cemetery. On climbing the wall, he had heard sounds like those of a sledge hammer upon iron. Almost before he had jumped down the other side of the wall these sounds had ceased. Owing to the darkness, he had lost his way, and it was some minutes before he reached a drive, that he thought led to the upper slope on which was the mausoleum. The moon had come out for a minute, and he saw a figure step out into the road. Suddenly, without warning, another figure had appeared—a man in a long, dark coat.

At this point of his narrative Mr. Tevelin's utterances became much plainer. The man in the long coat held something in his hand. Tevelin was sure it was a short-handled pick. The two figures had appeared almost simultaneously, so that, at first, he thought they were in company. A cloud was growing over the moon;

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the light was growing dimmer. He saw the first man turn and face the other. There was a blow—he could not see who struck it; but the first man fell to his knees, instantly rising and picking up something from the ground. At once there followed a ringing sound, as if one steel object had hit another. There had been no cry. No word was spoken that he could hear, but a fierce struggle seemed going on among the low pine branches; it lasted some minutes, and then another sound like a heavy blow and a groan, and for a long time there was silence.

Tevelin had not moved from where he had stood. But now the moon came out again, and he stole forward among the trees. It was at a corner of the older part of the cemetery, the place where some of the old graves were, with the flat tombstones. There, in the little open space, was a man bending over another on the ground. When he stood up he recognized who it was: Dr. Lawrence Kellogg! He knew him “by the stand of him.” He saw him bend again and examine the other man carefully, open his coat, and place his ear against his chest. Suddenly the doctor turned and ran! The figure on the ground lay half in the shadow, half in the moonlight. Tevelin stepped forward, mastering his fear. The man on the ground was dead! He had on a heavy fur cap, the ear tabs tied beneath his chin.

The rest of the Irishman’s testimony was brought out by questioning. He could not tell what animated him—it may have been the devil and the whisky—at all events, he testified that he picked the body up before he knew what he was doing. It suddenly had occurred to his muddled brain that he might become mixed up

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in the matter. He had half dragged, half carried it some distance, when suddenly he lost his footing and, with his burden, fell into the open drain. For some time he lay there, stunned; then, getting up, still under the influence of this nameless fear, he shoveled in the earth. Where he went after that, Tevelin could not tell. He did not know that the bottle of whisky had dropped out of his pocket. The next thing he remembered, he awoke under the pine trees down at Dr. Kellogg's; someone was shaking him; he was told he was arrested.

Taken altogether, Tevelin's testimony occasioned wonder. Its effect on the jury and on all those in the court room was puzzling. It did not bear the earmarks of truth; it seemed unreal, inexplicable! And an odd thing was, that he had stated that he had positively been unable to recognize who the dead man was! He had no idea whose body he had buried! The unreality of the story the district attorney tried to mitigate in a measure by asking some leading questions that even appeared to attack the credibility of his own witness; but it was with a purpose. He insinuated that Tevelin's drunken movements might, unconsciously, have had behind them some motive that might explain them; unwittingly this man, with his brain influenced by its befuddled condition, had indulged in a form of alcoholic reasoning. He might still have had a motive that at the time had governed him! Had he been a friend of the prisoner? The district attorney asked this question pertinently. He had. He owed him gratitude. Then it was brought out that he owed him money, too, for attendance on his wife. Could not this have influenced him so that, in his morally slackened state, he wished to shield his friend?—The district attorney's efforts were evident.

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The case was taking on a psychological interest. The court room was silent. With not a little cleverness Mr. Murger began to bring out this unconscious motive to account for his witness's strange actions. It began to look more as if Tevelin might be telling the truth after all! What would the lawyer for the defense ask him? Perhaps his testimony might be shattered in some way or the effect of it entirely annulled. Mr. Murger sat down; Tevelin drew a breath of relief. But in an instant he was called by name again. Judge Hollins, pointing a finger at him, asked a question so quickly, that it seemed like one long word.

"Did you get a note from the prisoner, directing you to tell the truth here on the stand?"

"I object!" cried Mr. Murger.

"The objection is sustained," replied the Court.

Judge Hollins's features never changed. "No further questions," he said. "We concede the truth of the witness's testimony."

The prosecutor was still ruffled. For the third time he strode across to Mr. Wilcox. Despite the fact that the judge's lightning interrogation had not been answered, the drift of the intention had left the mark. But it was not at the counsel for the defense that Mr. Murger's ire was raised at the moment. He croaked a whisper into his assistant's ear: "Oh, that Irish cur! that—" It was here Charlie Wilcox gave another start. "I'd like to put a bullet in him! Did you see how he changed his testimony?—ever so little, but just enough. I'm going to call Bill Gould, and prove the arrest, anyhow." From where he stood, he addressed the court room: "My next witness is"—he called the name aloud—"Sheriff William Gould."

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Mr. Gould, who had been sitting in the front row, looked up astonished. Then, awkwardly, he shuffled forward and was sworn. He testified that the district attorney had placed a "said" warrant in his hands to apprehend one L. P. Kellogg, who was about to escape from the country on the steamer *Celtic*. This act, he volunteered incidentally, had been communicated to the district attorney by Ellery Slocum. In pursuance of this "said" order of arrest, he had deputized Captain P. R. Leary of the Antioch police force as special deputy, and had gone to New York and here had repaired on board the "said" steamer in search of "said" L. P. Kellogg, accompanied by the deputy, in order to arrest him. He escaped them at the dock, but they caught him at the Grand Central Station and brought him on with them to the Four Courts. It was here that Mr. Murger gave the witness to Judge Tollins.

"Did you find Dr. Kellogg on the steamer, sheriff?" the latter asked. "Did you see him there?"

"No, sir. But——"

"That's all. Where did you find him?"

"At the Grand Central Station."

"What was he doing?"

"He was buying a ticket, sir."

"To what place?"

"Ticket to Antioch."

"Did you arrest him then?"

"No, sir; but——"

"Then you didn't arrest him at all. He came of his own accord?"

"Well, sir, he came back with me and Captain Leary."



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“ You haven’t repaid him the money he spent for *your* two tickets yet, have you? ”

“ No, sir. ”

“ Didn’t he buy them? ”

“ Yes, sir, he did. ”

“ He brought you both back, eh? That’s all, sheriff. ”

Here was a boomerang for the prosecution. Conscientious of a suppressed tittering, the new incumbent of county office went back to his seat next to Leary. The latter muttered to him as he sat down: “ Bad break we made, eh, Bill? ” But to this Mr. Gould had nothing to reply.

Mr. Murger’s discomfiture was almost comical; if he had any other witnesses to call, he did not seem to have them there on hand; the fact was, he had none. He had relied on helping his case with those whom the defense might furnish. In the expected cross-examining, there were one or two points he would bring out: First of all, that Kellogg and Bellwood had become enemies. He would insinuate that jealousy was the cause. Here would come in the woman—the dead man’s wife! But how he had been tricked from the start! Now he saw his mistake. The confession had been a put-up job! The Irishman in an interview at the jail had denied under oath that Judge Hollins had suggested it; but he had said nothing about receiving a communication from the prisoner! He should have arraigned Tevelin as an accomplice and rent him tooth and nail! Being the prosecutor’s own witness, however, he had now to accept his testimony as the truth and make the best of it! It was supposed that the prisoner would take the stand—and then would come his

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ance! Surely he would have to testify in his own  
'ense! Murger intended to accuse him of deliberately  
ing Bellwood to the lonely cemetery, in order to  
t him out of the way. There had come a pause. . . .  
, that tantalizing letter, the end of which he could  
st see protruding from inside the judge's coat!  
ould he dare to call him? Every minute that he  
itated he grew angrier. The pause was extending  
fatal lengths. It would be the weakest of exits if he  
uld declare his case closed now! Boldness was the  
ly thing to save the day! He drew his scattered  
ntal forces together for sudden attack and sought to  
rb his feelings.

"I shall ask the learned counsel for the defense to  
ce the stand." He endeavored to be polite, but his  
s curled like a snarling dog's; his knees shook—which  
s a bad sign, even to himself.

If "the learned counsel for the defense" was capa-  
of assuming that start of gasping, bewildered sur-  
ise, he was an actor of no mean order! His involun-  
ry gesture of pointing to himself, and his incredulous  
nfusion afterwards, drew every eye on his awkward  
vements as he rose. And why that frightened look,  
he pushed back the large envelope?

"Please take the chair, sir." Mr. Murger was  
owing calmer.

The clerk proceeded with the formalities; Judge  
llins raised his hand above the book.

"Now, judge"—Mr. Murger's voice had conde-  
nsion in it—"I'm going to ask you if you were  
esent at the rectory at the time of this quarrel be-  
een the prisoner at the bar and the Rev. Frank Bell-  
od?"

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“I protest, sir! I’m his counsel here. I stand on my rights; but I’ll answer that: There was no quarrel; the Rev. Bellwood was delirious—a sick man, with a sick, disordered mind. Dr. Kellogg was there as his friend and physician.”

“Have you ever represented Dr. Kellogg before in any legal matters?”

“Not in any court of law.”

“By the way, when *did* he retain you in this case?”

The witness appeared to falter. “He retained me”—he mumbled, and then stopped short. “He retained me between the hours of eleven and twelve o’clock at night on Tuesday, the 17th of October.”

“What! On the very night this crime was committed?”

“The night of this unfortunate occurrence.”

“Do you mean to tell me, and this Court, and this jury, that within an hour after this foul crime, he sought you to defend him?” Triumph and incredulity fought for mastery in Mr. Murger’s tones.

“So I am led to believe,” replied the judge with an effort that was almost too apparent. “This letter just handed me contains the retainer of which you spoke.”

“The letter given you here in this court room?”

“Yes, sir.” The old gentleman’s suffering was pathetic. He appealed in a dumb, hopeless way to Judge Porter, who was looking on in great astonishment.

Mr. Murger sneered now and took the jury into his confidence by a swift glance.

“But you have not opened it! Do you claim it to be privileged?”

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"It is from my client to me, his counsel."

"Where were you on Tuesday night, the 17th?"

"I was at Evanton."

"I ask you to prove that Dr. L. P. Kellogg retained you at that hour, and on the date you mentioned. Can you do it?"

The judge shuffled. "Yes—I suppose——"

Mr. Murger leaned toward the witness and shook at him a threatening half-closed fist. "I call on you to prove by that letter your assertion that, by its contents, you were retained at the time you mention," he repeated.

"There may be parts of it entirely confidential, as between client and counsel. . . . I protest, sir, at this whole proceeding!"

"Are you afraid?"

Judge Hollins buttoned his coat up tightly; he actually began to bluster. His client had rights, and so had he. This questioning was "brutal, cruel, uncalled for," and so on, to the point of almost rising from his chair.

Mr. Murger thrilled with excitement. His voice rose until it fairly cracked.

"I call on you, Horton L. Hollins, to read the whole of that letter in support of your assertion!"

"Again I protest! I haven't seen it! I haven't opened it!"

"Neither have I." Mr. Murger folded his arms now and gestured with his head. "But I will accept it as evidence of this statement that you may otherwise find difficult to prove."

The old lawyer took the packet out tremulously—it was all he could do to contain himself now; but he

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wished to carry matters further. He replaced it again and buttoned up his worn black coat.

Mr. Murger's eyes glistened, his teeth shone; he lost all control of himself.

"I ask you to read that letter—if *you dare!*"

"I should have to ask my client to waive his rights."

"Ask him!" Mr. Murger struck the table before him a blow with his knuckles that rang through the court room.

*Habet!* . . . He had him! How the judge's heart began to beat! His voice shook now, but with a sense of his coming triumph.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he began slowly, turning to the twelve men on his left. "The district attorney is on record. I shall ask my client if he is willing to waive his rights. . . . And in view of the circumstances, I shall advise him so to do."

Lawrence Kellogg nodded.

"The defendant waives his privilege." The counsel for the defense spoke more quietly than before. "And under cover of the prosecution's pledged word, I will read this unopened communication."

He sliced the big envelope with his thumb. The ticking of the court-room clock was plainly audible.

Mr. Murger's face turned mud-color. He had caught the gleam in the judge's steely eyes, now so calm, yet so sparkling. The witness's whole attitude was changed—he was a latent human cheer. He shook his tousled gray head and began clearly:

"Now, if it may please the Court, I will read this paper. It was handed to me but a few moments since, here in this court room. It is addressed to me, by my client, and never have my eyes seen it before." He

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looked at the heading and continued, his eyes running along the lines before him. "It is dated on the 17th of last month, and it is particular in the date, for it begins as follows:

"TUESDAY, *October 17th.*

"It is just before midnight. I am writing to tell you, my dear friend, of the occurrences of the past few hours. They are so unreal to me, that even now I can hardly believe that they are true—but they *are* true, horrible, and unbelievable as they may seem.

"A few minutes before nine I had my horse harnessed to the buggy, and drove away from the house, intending to bring back my old servant, Mary Dimock, who had gone to her son's house on account of the illness of one of his children. As you know, all of my possessions were packed up and my luggage had been sent away to go on board the steamer, and some to the Holland House. I intended to sail by the steamer *Celtic* the following afternoon. I don't know why I rehearse all this.

"As I drove up Cemetery Hill, shortly before ten o'clock, I heard a sound as of some one trying to break into an iron gate or door. It was so suspicious that I stopped and listened. All at once, as the moon came out, I saw a figure standing on the cemetery wall. It jumped down and disappeared. Impelled by I don't know what, I turned the horse from the road and tied him in the bushes, and, climbing the wall, I entered the cemetery.

"It was very dark—I could scarcely see my way. What I was going to do if I should meet the grave robbers—for that is what I thought of—I had no idea. I was unarmed. The noise had ceased.

"I stepped out into an open space, pushing my way through the pine boughs, and stood there, waiting for the moon to show me where I was. A little light came, and I waited for it to broaden.

"All at once, I heard the snapping of a twig behind me, and

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turning quickly, I could just make out a man's figure almost within arm's length of me. He had something raised above his head. Before I could move he aimed a blow at me, but the force of it caught in the pine branches above his head; still, it was of sufficient force to knock me down. I fell forward and then jumped to my feet. My hands had closed on something cold and heavy—it was an iron bar. I had just time to lift it above my head, when another blow knocked it from my hands—my assailant had lost hold of his weapon also. In another moment I grappled with him. He caught me by the throat. My shoulder was numb and dead from the force of the first blow, that had also grazed my forehead. We struggled together without uttering a sound. The uselessness of calling for help may have occurred to me. At all events, my one idea was to break that hold on my throat. Twice we fell under the pines, but each time struggled to our knees and this way fell out from under the branches and tripped over one of the graves. He fell on top of me and my head struck the ground at the corner of one of the flat tombstones that are supported on the pedestals of stone. I could not have cried out now if I wanted to, for his fingers had gripped me so hard that I was almost strangled. Up to this time I must have been fighting with one arm entirely—the other seemed almost paralyzed. I had fallen with my head and shoulders almost under the overhanging slab. It occurred to me that if I pushed myself beneath it, I might further break the strangle hold at my throat. I tried to do so and succeeded in raising my benumbed arm and grasping him close to the collar, where my right hand had taken hold. I twisted and strained with all my might. Suddenly his fingers relaxed—he made a movement, half leap, half shudder, and I managed to push him away at arm's length. Rolling over, I picked him up bodily and hurled him backwards, falling on him—he struck the ground hard and did not move. I got up on my knees. I was dizzy and weak for breath, and half expected an attack from another quarter, for I thought I heard another movement in the pine

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trees near me—but nothing came. The man on the ground lay still. I dragged him out of the shadow of the pines into the moonlight and there I saw who it was. It was Franklin Bellwood!—*Frank Bellwood*—God! How can I calmly write that name now, after what I have written. I opened the long coat that he was wearing and tore open his shirt—he was dead. *Frank Bellwood is dead!* God be my witness, I do not think I killed him—I think he died while he still had hold of me—but he was dead, lying on the ground, that was my firm belief. There was no pulse or heart beat. How he came there, or what he was doing there, I haven't the least idea—I cannot reason about it now; in fact, I have to persuade myself as I am writing, that it all has happened. Think of what it means to me! Think! Think! But I mustn't think, or I shan't finish—I am putting it all down just as it occurred.' ”

The judge paused when he had read so far. “ ‘Just as it occurred,’ ” he repeated. His voice thrilled through the court room. For an instant all the eyes shifted from him to the prisoner. He sat there motionless, his face buried and hidden in his hands. At once the judge began reading again :

“ ‘I thought of what to do. Get him away—take him to his house, and summon you and Dr. Rublee to determine what ought to be done. If he died from shock and the old trouble, then we could act as would be wisest. At all events, it seemed the best thing to do. As quickly as I could, I ran from the cemetery to the road, having now got my bearings, as I thought, and I got the horse and buggy and led them back through the gate—and now, Judge, here comes the awful thing!—I could not find the place, but at last I did: the old Morris plot. It was pitch dark again—I stumbled round everywhere, feeling with my hands, but could find nothing. *The body was gone, it was no longer there!* I cannot be mistaken; as I write, I am sure Frank Bellwood is dead.



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But what has happened? I don't know. Did any one see me?—I can't tell. If you knew how I am striving now to reason over it, and my agony and suffering of mind, you'd pity me. What am I to do? Maybe no one recognized me, if there was anyone there who saw it. Maybe they took him off—how?—where?—I left the cemetery in sheer terror—it must have been terror. I hardly remember how I got away. It seemed to me that I came to my senses again as I was unharnessing the horse here, but a few minutes since. If I should run away and say nothing I will be a coward. Am I afraid to face life any more? Am I?—I hardly know—I cannot reason. It requires almost all my control to make me believe that I am not mad—or going mad. I am writing you this in order to prove to myself that I am not. Somehow I do not care whether I live or not. I did not mean to write this, but you must understand my life is ruined—! How can I face it? Can I face it? It seems to me I cannot think here. Where shall I go?—what shall I do? If you were only here I'd be with you now and you would counsel me. I seem to be doubting everything. Doubting whether it occurred, doubting whether he is dead—if I might not have been mistaken. But no, I could not be. I leave you proof of my belief in that. The other doubt is the worst of all—perhaps I killed him! I did not mean to, but perhaps I did. But I will not dwell on it. I think poor Frank Bellwood died while still he struggled with me—I don't think he knew who I was, as I certainly did not know who he was. He must have escaped from Peyton's. Why was he there? But his body is there now—somewhere. O God help me!

“‘ If necessary, you can use this that I am writing, or use the information it contains in any way you please. It is incoherent; I dare not read it through—but it is true, just as I write it—it's God's truth! I have forgotten when you are coming back. If you were here now, I would not go away. How can my staying here to-morrow help matters? Yet perhaps I may be here to-morrow, who knows? I do not seem to have mind enough to

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think what your advice would be. All this is but to prepare you for anything that you may hear, and, having prepared you, perhaps you may understand everything, and know the temptation that now is in my mind. Will I have strength to resist it? I don't know. At all events, use this information as you may deem fit to use it. Take charge of everything for me.'"

The judge concluded. "There is just a signature attached to this," he said. "The full name of my client. I submit it all as part of the evidence asked of me, together with this printed document, a certificate of death, properly made out, excepting the place where it reads, 'Died—from causes to be afterwards ascertained.' I submit all this in evidence, as called for by the prosecution. I am still on the witness stand and again make oath that never before have I seen either of these papers. Are there any other questions the learned district attorney may wish to ask of me?"

There was a perceptible murmur throughout the court room—a movement of heads and bodies, as people settled back, and eye caught eye. It made more noticeable the intense stillness and fixedness of interest that had held every hearer within sound of the judge's voice as he had read the remarkable communication. Its very incoherency had added to its dramatic appeal. It had touched the jury also in a strange manner; they glanced at each other sideways, as if each one endeavored to observe the effect upon his neighbor. The foreman was the last who seemed to lose the tension that all had felt; he leaned forward, his head on one side, as if the judge were still speaking. Then, with a long breath, he sat back in his chair, his fingers drumming on his knees. At the reporters' table there was more

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movement; some were writing furiously. Mr. McKnight was the only one who seemed to have fallen out of the race; he was looking at the judge in wide-eyed admiration, tapping his fine white teeth with the end of his pencil. . . . "Magnificent," he said, under his breath, and, drawing the sheets of paper toward him, he began to write.

Mr. Murger, almost blind with rage, straightened himself.

"The witness is excused; the prosecution rests," he said, attempting to cover his chagrin with a challenging glare at his opponent. Sheer astonishment prevailed on every face. The jury eyed one another and shuffled in their seats. Then silence.

Judge Hollins, regaining his place beside his client, stood up, and cleared his throat. "I have no preliminary remarks to make, or witnesses to call." His voice was quiet, although it trembled slightly. "The defense rests on the prosecution's case."

Judge Porter glanced at the clock. . . . "The court is adjourned until three this afternoon," he announced.

It was a minute or two before anyone moved. The jury filed out. The prisoner and his counsel went through the side door together; but many people kept their seats.

Judge Hollins rose to speak as soon as the crowded court room settled down after the recess. His attitude and voice were quiet but forceful with confidence.

"I ask you, the gentlemen of the jury, to look only at the evidence. We cannot go behind it. This dear friend of mine sits before you, clothed in his in-

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nocence. If you have watched a drama, it was neither extemporized nor rehearsed—its value to this accused man's cause was accidental. From the beginning he has insisted on the truth. We have heard the truth, we have seen truth spring to life before our eyes, and we have had not to guess, suppose, invent, or summarize. The condition of my client's mind—broken and afflicted, staggering, stammering, from grief and terror—terror not for self—shows in the outpourings that his hand put to paper. I do not ask anyone to imagine what they might do were they placed in like position, and found themselves in this fell clutch of circumstance. He has faced his grief, he has faced his trial, and never have the kindly eyes of Truth left him. I shall not analyze his feelings. I do not think of motives. I shall not dwell on evidence—it is all plain. A free man, I believe, will leave this court room. Through the bandaged eyes of this figure of Justice sculptured on the wall, will look kindly eyes on him and you. Truth seeks no hand clasps of congratulation, Truth does not stop to linger or listen; she clears the way and guards it by her presence, and down the path she has made for him will walk my friend! His troubled hour, we all have witnessed—Truth is the motive we find in his heart.”

The old lawyer stopped short, but stood there with his hand on his client's shoulder. Nothing could have equaled the effect of this strange summing up! It seemed to link the testimony in favor of the prisoner's innocence into a chain stronger than any patient, carefully worked over molding of the links. It dismissed the evidence as unanswerable, and pleaded for sympathy. If the eyes of Justice behind her blinding

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bandage were reflected in the gaze that fell on the accused man sitting there, they were kindly eyes—dimmed, maybe, in their kindness.

The district attorney rose and began impetuously. The court room seemed to echo his raucous, vibrating voice. There was no denying the fact that Mr. Murger's summing up was the effort of his life! They were very few who credited him with any such hidden powers. For three quarters of an hour he had held forth. His discomfiture and perturbation at his apparent utter defeat in the morning had disappeared. He made the most of every telling point. Often he had ranged close to shallow waters. He did not openly accuse the counsel for the defense of double dealing; but nevertheless, he left the impression that it was there. He averred that they were afraid to call their witnesses, and by subterfuge had avoided putting the prisoner on the stand. He lingered on the fact that no motive had been shown. This missing motive dared not appear. The defense had taken good care to hide it. He halted as if about to mention a name. He asserted this motive dwelt in the heart of the prisoner—the strongest motive that ever dwelt in the heart of man. There were few men and certainly not a woman who listened to him who did not see the object he was aiming at. It left a strange impression. More than one lawyer in the court room—and there were many—regarded Mr. Murger as if they saw him through new eyes. They had never suspected him of any such capacities. The district attorney's speech had been impressive; however, not because of any gifts of legal oratory, or knowledge of court-room finesse, but because he had voiced his own personal feelings. He had given force

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to them, guarded though they were by his politician's cunning, and swept himself along with his hearers in the outburst of a passionate attack with all the impetuosity of a man who leads a forlorn hope in a desperate charge, not in the service of a cause, but to save annihilation! The silence that followed was a flattering tribute to his spell-binding influence.

Judge Porter began his charge; it was short and fair. The jury was left to decide the value of what they had heard and witnessed. It was not for them to read between the lines; their verdict admitted of no temporizing or considering of matters not brought out in the hearing. Testimony had been brought forward in an unwonted fashion; but it was testimony, nevertheless. They would have to consider it and place their own valuation on it, regardless of its manner of presentation.

The papers were handed them, and they filed out into the jury room.

Mr. McKnight was just writing the following words: "If Dr. Kellogg had been convicted the defense would still have been the cleverest in its method that was ever brought out in a court room. Horton J. Hollins, the prisoner's counsel, would have to be credited with an effort that would declare him to be one of the most resourceful and brilliant criminal lawyers in the country. But—" Here Mr. McKnight stopped writing again and rattled his pencil against his teeth.

Hardly anyone had left the court room except the judge, the jury, the prisoner, and his counsel. A murmur of subdued conversation, punctuated by an occasional emphatic voice rising in argument or denial, showed that there might exist some difference of opinion.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE VERDICT

**D**URING the long walk through the covered corridor to the jail neither Judge Hollins nor Lawrence Kellogg exchanged a word. The two deputies who accompanied them were silent also.

As the prisoner stepped into his cell, his counsel followed him and once more they sat together on the edge of the little cot. Lawrence had been thinking of what the district attorney had said. Had he known what was in his heart? What if the jury could have read the words in the two notes that now lay close to it!—the one that had bid him leave her, written the morning after the scene at the rectory, and the one that Judge Hollins had handed him when he had returned from Franklin Bellwood's funeral—the last words he would ever receive from her! His old friend shook him.

"It will soon be over. Don't be cast down." He spoke loudly with encouragement.

"How long do you suppose they'll keep us in suspense?" Lawrence asked the question feverishly.

The judge smiled. "Not very long, son. You will be a free man before nightfall. What do you intend to do?"

"Go—go anywhere—leave here! I don't want to have anybody talk to me."

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"I think we can arrange all that, Larry; but there will be a lot of your friends who will want to see you. Don't you think it would be better to meet them?"

"Spare me that," replied Lawrence earnestly. "You know, it's strange that I can't discuss things with you, or thank you, or express my feelings; but I imply cannot—you understand."

"I understand," said the judge. "You owe no thanks to me. You outlined your own defense and God Almighty managed matters—" He stopped suddenly: "They're coming for us—it means you're free! Do you hear me?" He smoothed Lawrence's curly hair affectionately. . . . "Here they are—come on!"

"The jury has returned, sir." One of the deputies poke in a low voice to the judge, from the cell door.

The old lawyer nodded; linking his arm with his client's, they retraced their steps through the echoing corridors to the court room.

"The jury will rise," said the clerk of the court. "The defendant will rise. Jurors look upon the defendant—defendant look upon the jury. How say you, Mr. Foreman—Guilty or Not Guilty?"

"Not guilty," replied the foreman.

"Hearken unto the verdict as now rendered by you! Not guilty, and so say you all.—Any further charges, Mr. District Attorney?"

"None that I know of," replied Mr. Murger shortly.

"You are discharged," said the Court.

Lawrence Kellogg made a movement that was hardly perceptible in the direction of the jury box. There was scraping of feet, murmurings, and, in the body of the court room, a sound like subdued applause. People



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stood up, some started for the railing. One or two jurymen extended their hands in eager greeting—but Lawrence stood there in a daze. He heard his counsel thank them. Then he remembered being once more hurried down the corridor, the judge's arm clasping him about the shoulders.

It seemed strange to return to the cell, when he could have stepped out into the street; but it was more welcome to him than the clamor of congratulation that was waiting at the court-room entrance.

“Free!—yes, he was free—acquitted on the ground of self-defense! But what did freedom mean to him? Over him settled a black cloud of despondency. Never would the sky look the same—never would the wind in the trees soothe him, or the notes of birds bring answering rejoicing to his heart. If he had felt like running till he could run no more, on that dreadful night when he had stood bareheaded at his study window and watched the growing dawn, he felt more like it now, as the gray of the early evening began to creep into the shadowless corridors. With the judge pacing beside him, sympathizing, by his very silence, Lawrence Kellogg walked up and down the empty gallery.

A loud voice and heavy footfalls sounded at the end of the tier of cells.

“Here comes Leary,” said the judge in a low voice. “You’ll have to speak to him. It is almost dark enough to leave and we’ll get out of this.”

The captain of Antioch’s police force approached with an embarrassed smile.

“Glad you got off, doctor,” he ventured. “I’m glad to shake you by the hand; they’ve been many waitin’ to do the same.”

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Lawrence took his great red paw and dropped it quickly.

Leary endeavored to cover his embarrassment. "Kind o' shy, ain't he, judge? Guess you can leave now without bein' seen."

He was holding something in his other hand. He brought it forward.

"Telegram for you, Judge Hollins, sir—arrived just as they was closin' up the court room. Won't you come into the sheriff's office and wait till you want to go?" He turned to Lawrence again. "I should think you'd want to get out of this 'bout as quick as you could. You were dodgin' them reporters, eh?"

Lawrence nodded. "I want to go away quietly, captain, that's all," he said.

Down below in the covered court, the lights had been turned up; they caught the reflection of the polished iron bars. A ribald song sounded from somewhere, and a coarse laugh followed.

"Come!" said Lawrence to the judge.

"Good-by, and good luck to you," said the captain.

"Good-by, and thank you," Lawrence rejoined, starting for the head of the iron staircase.

The judge paused as he passed by an electric light. He tore open the telegram and read it swiftly.

### LA JUNTA, COLORADO.

She has heard everything. Insists on going. Nothing but a word from you will stop her. Reply immediately.

Lawrence had halted, looking at him with a question forming on his lips.

"Want me to come on to Albany and do some lobby-

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

ing to defeat the new canal bill," he said. "Guess they know better than to let that rooster fight!" He replaced the telegram in his pocket.

In another moment he and Lawrence were breathing the crisp, cool air, as they walked down to the station. Just opposite the entrance was a little eating house.

"You step in here, Larry," said the judge, "and order a bite. I will run across, get your tickets, and be back."

"Get them to Boston," Lawrence answered quickly. "A steamer sails from there Wednesday morning. I'll go on that. It will give me time to make some purchases."

Newsboys were crying the evening paper: "Full account of the great murder trial," "Kellogg acquitted!" Lawrence went inside the empty restaurant and, stopping at the farthest table, sat down with his back to the door. The girl who came to wait upon him pushed the bill of fare almost in his face; in the other hand she held a copy of the *Evening Star*. She read it half audibly over his head as she loitered for his order.

"Well, he got off, didn't he?" she observed suddenly, ready to embark in conversation.

Lawrence was spelling over the names of the dishes as if they had been printed in Arabic. He wondered how his own voice would sound if he should speak.

"Take your time," said the girl good-naturedly, still reading.

If he could have done it, he would have put on his hat and coat and left. Food? he didn't want any food! But at last he ordered something—he had no idea what—and the waitress, to his relief, moved off to another customer.

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Over in the big station Judge Hollins had just finished writing a telegram, and was urging on the operator the necessity of rushing it through. It was addressed to Dr. Smith at La Junta :

Acquitted. Tell A. am coming on myself—leaving to-morrow morning. Wait for me. All's well.

So much will one friend do for another !

He crossed quickly to the eating house and sat down opposite Lawrence, making a great pretense of energetic talk.

“Can't get a berth for love or money, Larry,” he panted. “All taken. You'll have to sit up till you get to Rochester, I guess.” He handed over the tickets. “What have you ordered? I'm hungry as a wolf!”

But neither of them ate much. Although they were long over their meal, they hardly spoke. Once the waitress offered them the paper, but it was declined. At last they went out and paced up and down beside the freight sheds. It had begun to snow—shy flakes of early November falling softly, dampening the ground, rimming the fence tops, and outlining the bare branches of the trees. But neither the judge nor Lawrence thought of seeking shelter; side by side they kept up their walking.

A few minutes before nine they crossed to the railway station. Out of the darkness, dotted with the green and red points of the switch lights, the express thundered in.

“You'll write to me, Larry, won't you?—and your address will be your London bankers, the same as before.”

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

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"Yes, sir."

"You've no message for anyone?"

"No message except what I'm going to say to you—and that's a plain 'good-by.' I can't trust myself to speak, judge—don't make me."

"Son, son," murmured the old lawyer, "my heart's been talking with yours these long hours. You've spoken everything! I have heard your thoughts, my boy."

Once more the undercurrent in the hand clasp thrilled them both.

The train was moving.

Lawrence sprang to the platform and entered the close-smelling day coach and fell into the first empty seat.

Free! Free!—Yes. But how the chains of life bore on him! How they weighed him down! His fingers touched those written words that lay close against his heart. He seemed to feel the slender fingers weaving into his—that ever-reaching hand, never to be felt in earthly life! He drew the letter out. He knew it all; but in the dim light from the lamp above him, he read again the message that she thought would have reached him long before this in London.

LAWRENCE DEAR:

With the judge's letters and, I dare say, the newspapers—which I do not care to see—go these few words to you. I know your impulse, dear, is to come hurrying back. I have missed you, oh, indeed, I have missed you. I have thought of you, and am thinking of you all the time—it seems quite right and it sustains me. But if you were here I would not be so strong. Now, in this time of trouble, in which—and I pray no forgiveness for



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it—grief has small part, I hold you closer than ever as my own. I long for you, Lawrence—be patient, “the way is before us.” You once said that, beloved! But not yet.—Come when I send. Do not fear; they are taking such good care of me. I suppose it was the strain of the past weeks and days—no, the past years—that makes them fearful of my health. They would tell you here that I have broken down. I have not—I cannot sleep, my brain, my eyes, my nerves may be racked and painful; but they are things apart from me. My heart is yours, and it is in such strong, safe hands—so wait.

He did not know, as the train hurtled on through the darkness, that a thousand miles behind him, but speeding after him, was another word from her—the one word, “Come!”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE HOPE THAT DIES NOT

**W**INTER had let fall its coverlet over the undulating foothills, softening the grim outlines of the mountains beyond, filling with blue shadows the long stretch of the narrow valley. The pines, spreading in ink-black masses up the slopes, were distinct as blots on clean, white paper. Against the sky, the gleaming peaks—far away—looked to be but a stone's throw.

A man and a woman were following a wagon down the hard-packed road. The wheels squeaked musically as they crunched the snow—dry as flour in the crisp air.

“So you think it especially honest of me to tell all this?” As she spoke, the woman lifted her head and looked at the face of the man walking silently beside her. “Still my frankness has hurt you! I am sorry, very sorry. But you know the whole story. I would be utterly at loss for words if I tried to thank you for all you've done for me.”

“Don't try to.” The man's voice shook a little. “But, Amy, I wish it had been more—I only wish I could help you now. You see, if I had understood everything from the very first, it would have made no change in what I did; but I *did* understand at last, and it should have kept me from speaking—that's all.”

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He looked round at the face that was raised to his. The fathomless blue-gray eyes, the color of the snow shadows, were full of sympathy. Then a look of perplexity crossed the pure brow beneath the soft brown hair.

“I thought Judge Hollins had told you long ago. He knew.”

“It wasn’t necessary for him to tell me. I braved my own knowledge. I never saw him after my return to the East and, of course, I missed him on his flying visit here.”

“Do you mean to say that he never looked you up in Antioch—he never came to see you?”

Walter Smith shook his handsome iron-gray head slowly. “Maybe he did; but you see I haven’t been at Antioch all the time. I told you I’d been away; but I didn’t say how long. I have been there very little. Let’s see, this is December—it’s just a year ago that we came out here, isn’t it? Well, in January I left for Europe—I went as far as India. I’ve only been back a month. Where will I go now?” He seemed to ask the question of himself. “I shouldn’t have come—at all events, I shouldn’t have spoken!”

“Oh, please don’t talk that way, Walter; it hurts me; you know it must. I love you deeply as a friend——”

“Just as you love Judge Hollins?”

“Just as I love Judge Hollins. Don’t ask me outright questions. I’m so constituted that I must reply outrightly, too.”

Dr. Smith slowed his footsteps. They had been walking so fast that they had almost caught up to the wagon, upon which were a large leather traveling box and a heavy kit bag.



## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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“ We’ll be at the station in a few minutes, and then it will be ‘good-by’ again.” He stopped and looked down the road. The telegraph poles marking the railway stretched across the valley entrance like a slender barrier against the outside world. At the bottom of the long slope, descending before them, was a collection of small houses, circling about a great water tank. It looked desolate and lonely beyond words.

“ Don’t you ever feel like going beyond those two rocky points?” he asked. “ You can’t stay here all your life.”

“ We’re very happy, my mother’s so much better—and I have the children,” she replied ambiguously. “ I’m as happy here as anywhere; since Aunt Em has come to live with us, we’re all together—” She paused and then, sadly, with a little catch of breath: “ I would not know where to go.”

“ Amy!” He turned to her. “ Let me think there may be some hope for me!” How often have men pleaded thus in their despair. “ Let me say a final word, even if it’s almost cruel. You have been frank with me—let me truthfully speak my thoughts: I do not think Lawrence Kellogg will ever come to find you.”

He saw her grow pale beneath the weather flush on her cheeks; the beautiful lips trembled for an instant.

“ He will come some day—I will wait here for him,” she said.

“ But let me tell you this ”—his voice was kindly in its earnestness—“ when I was in London, I went to his bankers; they could tell me nothing. One of the clerks had seen him at Southampton. He had drawn a draft for his full account. They had returned many letters, sending them to Judge Hollins. Had you written? ”

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He was sorry he had asked the question—she had winced as at a stab.

“Yes; I had written him.”

“And you got the letters back?”

“Yes; and I returned them to the bankers again, with a request to keep them there ten years, if necessary.”

“Ten years is a long time.”

“I shall wait my whole life, Walter—whether he is alive or dead. Oh, don’t you see?” she went on hurriedly, as if forgetting that her words must add to the anguish of the man who listened—“don’t you see that all he has suffered demands that much of me? Oh, if men only understood women better! They apply their unwritten rules of what is right or wrong to themselves, without regard to us. We suffer through them. When you and Judge Hollins took me away, you thought you were doing me a kindness—maybe you were. . . . But he knew I loved him and my place was there beside him. What does the world count, if our hearts are free of sin? Why should we be afraid, then, of what it says and thinks? A woman does not wish to be shielded all the time. She glories in a chance to face the world! There was no share of guilt—no one dares to believe that. His heart and mind were pure. He would not ask anything of me; he would not have me burdened, as he thought; but he might have known what I would ask of him. Some day he *will* know. I must wait—that’s all.”

“But if you should find that”—he hesitated—“that he no longer was alive?”

“Then I would find the place where he was buried—and some day I would go there.”

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How the low tones thrilled as she spoke those words! Never before had she appeared so beautiful. It was as if a young girl's soul-voice was speaking through the years of her womanhood.

"But he *is* alive, Walter; I know it! oh, I know it!" The hope that dies not lived in these words—thrilled in the way she spoke them.

How could he go on and tell her what was in his mind? He could not volunteer it—but the thoughts were near his lips. The question that she asked him, suddenly brought them forth.

"Is there no way to get a trace of where he went?" she asked.

"I tried to find one."

"What!" She gazed at him and then caught his arm. "You? You tried to?"

"Yes. That's why I went to India. I thought there was a clew and followed it."

"What was it? Where did it end?" Her other hand now grasped him; he could feel the pressure of her fingers. He looked into the depths of her brimming eyes.

"It was not very clear."

"But where did it end?—You haven't finished."

"It ended"—he caught his breath—"But why should I tell you? I may be all wrong."

"Tell me."

"It ended in the Indian Ocean, Amy—in a wreck of a little steamer bound for Batavia. . . ."

She staggered back from him, her hand at her heart. "But do you *know*? Do you *know*?" she asked, making a motion as if to ward off something he might say.

He shook his head. "I would to God I did! It was

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the slenderest chance. I had studied the Southampton lists for days. All the steamers that had sailed from there. I had gone to all the banks, and at last I found where he had made a deposit and left some papers. He had drawn everything out again the day before the P. & O. *Ganges* sailed. On her lists was a name 'L. Perry.' At the office they described him—it was much like Lawrence Kellogg. They had a signature—it was like his writing. It was the slenderest of clews; but I followed it to Aden, to Bombay, and to Calcutta. It ended as I told you."

"He is alive. . . . Why did you do this? "

"I wanted to be sure of something."

"Sure of what? "

"Sure of your happiness, Amy."

"You would have brought him back? "

"Yes, if I could—if he would come. You see, I knew you loved him, when you would have gone to him at the time of the trial. But there was a thought of self in it also. I wanted to be sure how I might stand."

Amy Bellwood was regarding him with a strange light in her eyes. "There is but one word to use," she said slowly, "a strange old word: It was chivalrous of you, Walter." She caught his hand.

He turned away a little. A look of bitterness crossed his face. What modern pessimist was it who had called chivalry "romantic suicide"?

But Amy was still speaking. "Oh, I thank you—how I thank you!" she said. "And yet I can never show it as I would like to—I never will be able to. I can think of nothing more to say."

"There is nothing more to say. . . . I should have rested on the knowledge that I had before; but I was

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over-youthful—I dared hope. So I came to you—and now I am going away again.”

They had entered among the houses. The wagon was disappearing round the corner of a building. The driver looked back at them and called something as he pointed westward.

“Train’s coming in!”

It brought them back to earth!

A few hundred yards ahead was the little station with the name “FARLEY” on it in large letters. A mile away a white pennant of steam trailed along the edge of the inclosing slope between high snow banks.

“We’re just in time.”

The commonplace expression seemed to ease the tenseness of the situation. They were on the platform. The train did not stop long. She gave him both her hands—it was not necessary to speak. In another moment she stood there all alone. There were sobs in her throat that she found difficult to master.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### IN EXPIATION

**W**INTER was vanquished—the snows retreated. Only, here and there, on the higher slopes, to the north of every big black boulder, hid small, dispersed rear guards, fighting to the last. Then they, too, dwindled in the warm May sunshine. The swollen streams had subsided, and the tender cottonwoods blossomed along the banks.

Soon the sheep men began to drive their herds up from the mesa into the hills, following almost in the green footprints of the spring. Not many years before, the elk had browsed there on the succulent young grass; then the cattle. But slowly the close-cropping sheep were driving them out also, victors in the conflict for survival. Nevertheless in many places the cowboys and the herds still held to the open ranges, though the reign of the cattle kings was doomed.

On the side of Clear Water Valley, four miles from the little station of Farley, nestled a low-roofed dwelling built of pine logs, its wide veranda exposed to the southern sun. It was not a ranch—anyone could see that at a glance; there were no corrals, no outbuildings, no bunk house. It had the unmistakable air of feminine occupation. A small stable beyond sheltered a decrepit cow pony and a good riding horse. There was

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a patch of a flower garden at the bottom of the steps that led down from the veranda.

And on this fine spring day an old colored man was working there, lifting the plants out of their little pots and placing them in the ground, molding the loam about the roots with his knuckles. But he was not working alone—he had two able assistants to lighten his labors: a slender square-shouldered little boy of eight and a golden-haired young miss of six, somewhat bedraggled in appearance, from the fact that she had been crawling about on all fours and, so constantly had the golden hair interfered, that her cheeks and temples were smudged with very earthy tints. She rose to her knees and tossed back the hated, interfering locks with both her hands.

“I jes’ wish I had hair like yours, Peter,” she said, addressing the old darky. “It’s even better than Jack’s for working in a garden.”

The old man chuckled. “Hyar like mine, missy?”  
“Yes. All nice and kinkily.”

The little boy looked up and tried to catch his sister’s eye. He had the innate perceptions of the gentleman, the born fear of referring to physical detractions; but the young lady perceived nothing.

“Dishyer’s wool, missy, ’tain’t no hyar; an’ black skin goes wif it.”

“It must be awful nice,” said the little girl with the gray eyes, “because, you see, you don’t have to wash your face so often.”

The boy stood up. “You’ll have to wash your face now,” he said. “There’s mother calling you.”

The girl rose to her feet, tugging at a refractory stocking. “Coo-ee! coo-ee!” she called, in an-

## IN EXPIATION

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swer to a distant voice; and cheerfully, in obedience, she hopped, skipped, and jumped up the veranda steps.

"Amy didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Peter," the boy volunteered. "And then, you must remember she's only a child."

"Hurt meh feelin's?" grunted the old negro. "I ain't got no feelin's, and hyar is hyar, and wool is wool. And talkin' o' dat, Mistah Jack, jes' look at dem sheep yondeh, comin' up the valley."

To the eastward, in the middle of the wide space between the hills, was an incoming, huddling tide of dusty backs. The sounds of the distant bleating could be heard, and now and then the voices of the herders or the barking of the sheep dogs that kept the big flock on the move.

"More 'an a hundred," said the boy.

"Specs mos' likely more 'an a thousand."

"Lessons!" called a voice, that had the note of the thrush in it.

The boy made a rueful face. "Lucky you don't have to study," he said to the colored man, as he dusted off his knees.

"Yes, seh! Guess I's a pretty lucky pusson all roun'."

Amy greeted little Jack on the veranda and gave him a pat between the shoulders as he passed by.

"Hurry in!" she said, "and clean yourself up. Your grandma will hear your arithmetic."

The boy's face showed a mixture of delight and disappointment. Grandma was not exacting, and was easily sidetracked into story telling.

"Where are you going, Marsie?"



## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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“I’m just going down to the station, dear. Run in.”

“Won’t you let me go with you on Nick? We’ll go like the wind!”

Amy smiled. The only wind that poor Nick, the pony, had to go on would hardly take him out of a walk. She shook her head.

Without another word, the boy skipped into the house, as cheerfully as the little girl had obeyed at the earlier summons.

Amy Bellwood stood looking out over the sunny valley. The dust rising from the myriad hoofs of the distant flock floated above and before them in a red-brown cloud.

“Peter,” she called to the old colored man working below her, “put the saddle on the horse. I’m going down to Farley.”

The man-of-all-work hobbled off, for he was slightly lame, and Amy stood waiting, leaning against the hitching rail, to one side of the little garden.

She was dressed in a black, short riding skirt held up under one arm, a white linen blouse, and a man’s soft black hat with a raven’s wing was on her fair brown hair. She looked more girlish than ever. It seemed impossible to think of her as the mother of two children, one a boy who reached quite to her waist. But, despite the girlishness, there was a saddened, almost haunting, look in the gray eyes that gazed out across the valley, a patient, but at times pathetic, droop to the lips, even when they smiled. As she stood there, her attitude seemed to fit in with her mood—if mood it was. “Waiting”—that was it. She was waiting. Would she have to wait always?

## IN EXPIATION

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The led horse appeared at the corner of the building. She mounted into the saddle from the steps of the veranda and rode off down the valley slowly. As she left the little trail that followed the side hill and came down into the road that led to the town, she passed by a dusty figure, trudging unsteadily along with a dog at his heels. The blanket, the canvas bag, and the long stick in his hand showed him to be a shepherd, one with the flock, most likely, that had gone into the valley toward the mountains, there to be guarded by their lonely watchers. The reason for the man's unsteadiness was apparent; just before she reached him, he had thrown an empty bottle off to one side of the road. As he passed her, he glanced up and made a quick motion with his arm before his eyes, stepping to one side so suddenly that he almost lost his balance.

Amy had hardly noticed him. Below, on the railway, she could see the train creeping across the gateway to her world.

The mail was in! And every mail she watched for!

There was not a man or woman or child in Farley who did not know the brown horse by sight; they were few who had not, on one pretense or another, spoken to his rider. The clerk at the general store was delighted to hold her stirrup; his employer, Mr. Moody, the postmaster, always left his duties or his other customers and hurried forward to wait on her in person, for the chance to exchange a few short words.

There were two letters this morning: one, in a large envelope, dated from Brimfield, addressed in Judge Hollins's scrawling hand, and the other with the English stamp in Dr. Smith's firm, angular writing.

She opened the judge's first; it was short and prin-

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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cipally on business. He had at last sold Lower Meadow Farm and, after discharging the mortgage, there was a sum left, which he had placed at her mother's disposal in the bank; inclosed were some papers for them to sign. Brimfield was just the same as ever. There was no news to give, and nothing to report from London.

She opened the other, and then stopped before she had read it through. Holding it in her hand, she went outside. Thanking the clerk who stood there patting the brown horse, she mounted quickly and rode up the trail toward the valley. When free of the houses, she let the reins drop and slowly unfolded the letter on her knee.

It was dated from a small English watering place, and began informally with an explanation of his being there. It appeared to be just the place he was looking for—"quite out of the world, and restful—a steep little village, clinging to a cliff, enlivened by happy fishermen and a flock of homing sea gulls." Strange enough, he had seen Miss Bromley in London; she was there as companion to an old lady with whom she had come abroad.

Amy lifted her eyes for a minute from the note. . . . Grace Bromley! They had grown to be fast friends during the time that the slender little dark-eyed nurse had been with her at "Valley Lodge." She had missed her sadly when she left.

The glance aside was but for a moment, and she began to read again. The top of the next page began with: "And now, my dear child, some news!" She drew a breath and read intently, the paper shaking a little in her fingers. He had found out something she must

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know at once—he had discovered who the “L. Perry” was, who had sailed on the *Ganges*: A young indigo planter who came originally from Berwickshire. The resemblance, from description, to Kellogg had been accidental. He had succeeded in getting into correspondence with the family, and found out that the young man had been lost, sadly enough, in the wreck of the Batavian steamer. The letter concluded with the news that he had just received a note from Miss Bromley and that she intended writing to her friends at the valley. That was all.

Amy placed the two envelopes in the pocket of the saddle and picked up the reins. She had two knights in her service! One thinking only to serve and do her bidding, and the other thinking he served her best by keeping away. Yes—for how long? how long? she thought. The news of the unraveling of the clew had caused her not the least surprise, and hardly the least comfort. She was as sure that Lawrence Kellogg was alive somewhere, fighting his own fight, as she was that the warm sun shone down on her! But where? oh, where? When would he return? Like him, but in a different way, she had severed all connection with the past. There were no ties that bound her to Brimfield. Her life there had not been such as to cause her happy reflections. And there was another reason also. Mrs. Blatchford, with whom the high air of Colorado had not seemed to agree, had gone back to live with some of her husband's relatives. It was hardly a month now, since those at “Valley Lodge” had received the sad news of the old lady's death. It had been impossible for Amy to go East; her mother demanded her attention, and could not have stood the journey.

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Mrs. Winter, ever since that long afternoon's talk, when she and her daughter had laid their hearts bare to one another, had shown the reflex of a mind at ease. The poignant grief at the loss of her sister-in-law had, for a time, upset her; but now she was recovering from that, and the lips, so long querulous and drawn by pain and worry, had relaxed again, and she drifted into the happy and, to all appearances, contented life of the little household at the lodge. There was nothing to cause anxiety; they had more than sufficient for their needs; the monthly remittances hardly encroached upon the income Judge Hollins managed for them. The Mexican mining stock had placed them all beyond the borderland of care! But Amy had often thought of the words Walter Smith had spoken as he looked out across the barrier: "No," she could not "live there always." Where would she go? The growing children would soon be demanding those things not to be found in the simple out-of-door life of a half wilderness. But there was no use of looking so far ahead; her hopes, her dreams, waking and sleeping, were anchored to one thought: the man she loved—the man she had always loved! Never did she dwell on or attempt to dissect the reasons for her marriage to Franklin Bellwood. She had yielded to circumstance, to pity, and maybe to the impulse of the lonely mind, the aching forlorn heart, shut off forever from its goal. To her, Franklin Bellwood's own loneliness had appealed—his weakness, his necessity; and in this pity, his pleadings and her mother's wishes had borne effect. But whenever her thoughts flew back to those days when she, open-eyed, had made this wrong start, she closed them out. As to the children that God had given her—they had been,

## IN EXPIATION

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and would always be, her safe guides along the hard road and through the mists!

When she reached the lodge, she found Mrs. Winter on the veranda, watching the little ones, once more down in the garden. The old lady, with her straight features, refined without nobility, decided without determination, had the fragile look of the invalid and possessed many habits that went with her condition.

“Did you bring the papers, Amy?”

“They don’t come until to-morrow, mother.”

Mrs. Winter dropped a copy of the *Denver Sentinel* in her lap and pointed to it. “We’re so peaceful here,” she said. “So peaceful, it seems hard to think that there should be such things going on, beneath a sky like this, as I’ve just read about.”

“What things?”

“Why, this—these murderings and killings—this war between the sheep herders and the cattle men. Only last week, not thirty miles from here, it seems they had a battle—men shot and killed. It isn’t Christian-like; it isn’t civilized. Only the other day this happened—and so close to us! . . . Get any letters, dear?”

Amy sat down beside her and opened the judge’s epistle and placed it in her mother’s hands.

Mrs. Winter put on her spectacles and read it through. Tears shone in her eyes as she finished. “There are no old footsteps to look back to now and to follow again,” she said. “They’re all new paths ahead of us.”

“Pleasant paths, I hope.”

“Whom is the other letter from?”

“From Walter Smith. He is over in England.”

Mrs. Winter drew a long sigh. There was one name

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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that never passed between her daughter and herself. She had hoped more than once that Walter Smith might urge his suit with all success and bring the panacea of forgetfulness. But never, after the fearful lesson through which she had lived, would she think of speaking to influence her daughter's mind. But she knew it and the aching heart, all the same, and very often in the long silences, she saw the patient, pathetic look of waiting, and read the thoughts back of the gray eyes that had once looked so forgivingly in her own and brought peace to her soul.

Another month went by. It was early June. Amy had ridden up the valley on the big, brown horse. She had gone farther than she ever had before, and there was the charm of new country about her. On every side extended other valleys into the foothills, some opening into long stretches of rich meadow land. She could catch a glimpse of a distant peak she had never seen before, that had been hidden behind the others. The wind was blowing stronger from the north. There was wine in the very air! The horse did not seem to feel the distance he had traveled and, as she drew him in, Amy looked about her, like a discoverer. The main valley was wider than it was nearer the entrance; but the trees that lined the stream banks seemed dwarfed and stunted, the far-away pines were scattered like skirmishers, instead of being in close column. To the south, on the side of a slope, she saw a number of white dots—little hummocks among the green grass. They were too quiet to be sheep, she thought, and, impelled by curiosity, she forded the stream and rode over to get a nearer view. All at once the brown horse shied

## IN EXPIATION

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at something. She looked down and saw a dead ram lying in the bushes, and beyond, a heavy ewe. Looking closer, she perceived still another; and then, as the wind changed suddenly, she knew the story—The herders driven out of the valley at the point of the Winchesters of the cow men! The war had come close to them after all. Sickened at the sight and the thought of what had gone with it—for it was reported that two men had been killed, and there still lay, at a house in Farley, a badly wounded herder—she dashed across the stream and urged the horse to a gallop. All at once a moving object, coming down the hillside toward her, attracted her attention. Many times had they heard the coyotes howling at night from “Valley Lodge,” and once or twice she had caught a glimpse of one. But this was larger. She drew in the horse again. The animal was far enough down the stream to have headed her off; but now it changed its direction and came straight toward her. Then she saw it was a sheep dog—one of the nondescripts that do their work as well as if their ancestry harked back to the strain of the highlands. On seeing her stop, the dog stopped also, and began to bark, running back, and coming toward her again. Losing all fear, she rode toward him now. The animal greeted her joyfully; but his actions seemed unusual—he would run a little ways, still barking, and turn to watch her. There crossed her mind the stories of dogs that had brought rescuers and conveyed messages. By every means in his power this one seemed bidding her to follow, and at last she did so, giving a glance at the sun that was ready to dip into the heavy clouds that piled high above the crest of the mountains. It must be much later than she had thought! When he per-



## **THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE**

ceived that he was being followed, the dog trotted straight ahead, occasionally looking back, halting, and starting on again. The wind was blowing from the north once more, and the odor of the dead sheep was not perceptible.

Around the shoulder of a hill she followed, and there before her was a little hut, and back of it, the sheep corrals. Her guide bounded forward whining joyously. Amy dismounted, her heart beating strangely. She had heard the sound of a human voice—half moan, half cry for help! Dropping the reins over the horse's head, she ran to the door and peered within.

“Water!—Get me water!”

Hanging over the edge of a low bunk, was a hand moving weakly. She opened the door wide now, and stepped inside. A man lay there, fully dressed. She could not see his face; but it was evident he was helpless. On the floor beside the bunk, a pail lay overturned, and near it, a cup and an empty tin of condensed milk.

“Are you hurt? What can I do for you?”

“Water!” Again the voice moaned.

“Where will I find it?” She asked the question quickly, pulling aside the rough curtain made of an old burlap bag.

A white face looked up from the blankets.

“Path, the left—downhill—the spring.”

Without another word, she picked up the tin bucket and hastened from the house; following the path she found the spring oozing out of a pebbly hollow and melting into the soggy turf. She dipped the bucket full and hastened back. Swiftly she knelt beside the bunk, with the cup in her hand.

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“No—no; don’t try to raise your head. I’ll give it to you.”

Bending forward with that trick known only to those who have worked in hospitals, she slipped her arm about the man’s shoulder, lifting him slowly.

“Don’t drink it all—now. That’s enough. Tell me, where are you hurt?”

For the first time she noticed the rich brogue in the man’s voice as he spoke and thanked her weakly.

“The saints in heaven bless you—I’m shot, lady—tried to kill me—they killed the sheep—they jumped me Monday afternoon—crawled here.”

“Lie quiet—let me see what I can do.”

Her eyes had become accustomed to the fading light in the dingy room. With a deft hand she opened the man’s shirt and found the wound, feverish and festered from lack of treatment.

“I must boil some water; where can I make a fire?”

“The stove—in the corner, ma’am. My legs is gone. . . . What day is it?”

“Wednesday. Keep still; don’t try to move.” As she talked, she was breaking up some kindling to put in the stove, and had already filled the kettle with water from the bucket. She found some matches lying loose on a shelf. It had begun to grow darker. The spurt of the match as she struck it and held it above her head lit up the cabin. On a corner of a rough table stood a lamp with still a little oil dampening the edge of the almost used-up wick. She lit the fire; the kindlings caught and smoked vilely.

The man who had kept silence moaned. “More water!”

“I’ll give you some in a minute; but you must

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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not drink too much at once. Have you had any food?"

He shook his head. . . . "No, ma'am. I couldn't move—my legs is paralyzed."

He had diagnosed the case correctly. After her first glance, Amy had thought that his spine had been hurt—the bullet had drilled through him. He had evidently dragged himself to the cabin on his hands and elbows.

All at once the thought came to her: What could she do? She was all alone and every minute it was getting darker. The clouds that had been towering above the mountain had helped to close out the usually fiery sunset, and now, there sounded the grumbling of distant thunder, and the door swung to with a loud bang. She thought of the horse outside. Perhaps she would have time to ride for help and direct a rescuing party from below! But as she opened the door, she saw something that caused her heart to sink. Trotting away, tripping occasionally over the reins about his feet, was the brown horse. As he came to the more level ground, at the bottom of the slope, he broke into a run. She could just make him out as he plunged across the creek and struggled up the other side. Now in the stillness, she could hear the stones rattling underneath his fast-flying feet!

The wind had died away; a scattering streak of lightning leaped out of the black west; big drops of rain began to fall. Something moved near her—coming closer, slowly. It was the sheep dog—she called to him; he stopped suspiciously. Then a wailing voice sounded from the hut. . . . "Oh, don't leave me; for God's sake, come back!"

She looked toward the door. The lamp was out!

## IN EXPIATION

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Summoning all her courage she entered again, the big dog sniffing at her skirts. The wick needed trimming; she pulled it up with her fingers. Feeling in the darkness for the matches, at last she found them, but only one—the very last—would light! She replaced the chimney, and, as the flame burned steadier, crossed over toward the bunk, the dog following her, his suspicions lulled.

“What is your name?”

There was no reply. The man seemed to be making an effort to concentrate his mind. “My name is”—his voice was faint—“my name is O’Hara, ma’am—Patrick O’Hara.”

She was bending over him now. She gasped and caught her breath.

“No; you’re Patrick Tevelin from the Bend at Brimfield!”

His eyes looked up at her. “Who are you? For God’s sake, speak! Who are you?” The weak voice was hoarse and frightened.

“I’m Mrs. Bellwood—Franklin Bellwood’s wife.”

“O God, help me! Saint Joseph, intercede for me!” he mumbled, lifting his arm across his eyes, as if not only to shield them from the glare, but to shut her face out from his sight.

Amy placed the lamp on the side of the upturned box.

“Don’t be afraid, I’m here to help you. I’ll do all I can.”

“I knew they’d find me out!” The man was moaning. “Could you get a priest? I’m going to die.”

“Keep quiet, Patrick. Take a little water. When the kettle boils, I’ll see what I can do to make you

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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easier. When did you come here? When did you leave Brimfield?"

"A year ago—I came to Denver; you followed me; you followed me!"

"No, no," she said. "You're dreaming, Patrick; quiet now, quiet."

There was nothing with which to make the dressing for the wound. Her glance fell on a pair of sheep shears lying in a corner. She severed the wide sleeves of her linen waist and dropped them in the kettle. Her bare, rounded arms gleamed in the light of the lamp, as once more she bent over the wounded man. How Tevelin had ever lived as long as he had was a wonder to her! After bathing his head and hands, she saw that little could be done for the frightful hurt.

The storm had broken in great fury now; the lightning and thunder were incessant. The big dog, as if seeking comfort, crept close against her side. For some moments the wounded man had not spoken. Then, all at once, he began mumbling, the words growing plainer.

"Hail Mary, Mother of God"—he seemed to forget the prayer and began it over and over; then he stopped. "Holy Father, I confess this grievous sin—" He was wandering in his mind, talking as if he addressed a priest. "Grant absolution," she heard him say. There was no use endeavoring to stop him. He went on, sometimes in incoherence, but with the contrite freedom of the confessional. His breath was growing weaker. As she placed her hands beneath the blankets, she felt his body cold. His eyes were glazing slightly and his brow was damp. She tried to rouse him to consciousness.

"Where are your wife and child, Patrick?"

## IN EXPIATION

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“Denver—Front Street—she’s working— Absolve me, holy Father—absolve me of my sins. . . .”

But listen! What was this he was saying now?—Amy’s heart almost stopped beating! What were these words she heard? . . . He spoke her husband’s name and Lawrence Kellogg’s! . . . She rose, trembling, swaying on her feet, her eyes searching all about the squalid hut. There, on the corner of the table, was a cheap, thumbed notebook, its leaves kept open by a stub of a pencil. She brought it over to the bunk. It contained a scrawling record of the lambing ewes. Quickly she bent down and began to write on a blank page.

“Patrick!”—she shook the man—“Here, let me lift your hand.” She placed the pencil in his fingers. “Patrick—can you hear me?” She was very close to him, her voice deep and vibrant. “Let me read what I have written here—they are the words you spoke.” Slowly and distinctly she pronounced each one.

“Oh, holy Father”—he began again. She stopped him now. All her will power was impressed in the grasp on that rough, red hand, seamed by the biting sheep dip. As she spoke, she seemed to be calling the man’s soul back to a forgotten duty.

“You can write, Patrick—sign your name here. Your name: ‘Patrick Tevelin.’ Do you hear me?”

The fingers, pressed against the book she held to them, began to move—and then—O God!—with a crackling of burned wick, the exhausted lamp went out!

A terrific crash of thunder, preceded by a brilliant glare, rolled down the valley. The door of the little hut trembled as if it would burst in. She sat there in the darkness—rigid and upright—the notebook in her



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lap. . . . There was no sound from the blankets. Putting out her hand she touched the dead man's face!

She did not recoil or start; it seemed to bring her to herself. There was a faint glow in the little stove; she knelt beside it and blew the embers to a tiny flame that died away instantly. But in that instant she saw plainly.

Patrick Tevelin had signed his own last confession! His name was there!

Sinking down on the rough bench beside the table, her head in her bare arms, she waited. And there the dawn found her.



“And there the dawn found her.”



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## CHAPTER XXX

### THE DEVIOUS WAYS

**T**HE sheep dog barked loudly. Amy raised her head. She was chilled and numbed through, her arms like icicles. Light was coming through the cracks and chinks of the cabin. Outside were the sounds of men's voices and horses' hoofs. She staggered across the uneven floor and flung the door open.

Half of the male population of Farley seemed to be there! Mr. Moody, the station master, the keeper of the saloon, and the proprietor of the railway eating house. And here came Peter, riding the big, brown horse; with him, a thickset man—a stranger—on a pinto pony. They gazed in speechless amazement at the slender, bare-armed figure.

The postmaster dismounted instantly and came forward, taking off his coat. "Thank God, we've found you, ma'am!" he said, as he placed it about her shoulders. "We have a buggy down below, at the end of the trail."

It seemed as if the others were about to cheer—and then they stopped and looked at her astonished. She had beckoned quickly, turned, and gone inside the hut and stood there pointing to the bunk. They crowded after her, taking off their hats.

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

"He died last night," she said. "I found him wounded here."

"Who is he? What is his name?" It was the stranger speaking.

"His name is Patrick Tevelin."

The man stranger looking at her in frankly open admiration, wondering at her coolness, repeated it aloud.

"Where does he hail from—the East?"

"Yes; did you know him?" She asked the question with an odd break in her voice.

"I was at a murder trial back there at a place called Brimfield. A man of that name was a witness."

"Who are you?"

"My name is McKnight. I'm a reporter. I'm out here for my paper, writing up this dreadful business—special correspondent."

She was about to say something further to him, when the colored man attracted her attention.

"I'd betteh ride down an' tell 'em you're safe an' soun', mistis," he said. "I guess dey want to know."

"Yes, Peter, I was looking for you; it was the very thing I was going to tell you."

She stepped outside into the early morning light. Some of the men followed her.

The postmaster came to her side. "We didn't know what had happened, Mrs. Bellwood, ma'am," he said. "Last night your colored man came down to town and told us that the horse had come back by himself, so we organized this party."

"Were you out last night?"

"Yes, ma'am, most of us."

For the first time she noticed that some carried lan-

## THE DEVIIOUS WAYS

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terns, their clothes were wet, and across the saddles hung the yellow slickers.

Mr. Moody detached his oilskin from where he had flung it over the goose neck, and put it on.

"You keep that coat—and button it up tight," he half commanded her. "It is chill this morning." He pointed down the trail to the edge of the stream, now swollen from the storm. "There's the buggy, ma'am; it's a rough road, but I guess we can make it safely."

As she walked down the trail, Amy's mind was concentrated on one thought: the signed confession that she still held in her hand. Some of the men had noticed her clasping the old notebook to her breast and thought it strange.

Mr. McKnight was overcome with curiosity. The coincidence of names, for he had learned hers before he had volunteered to join the searching party, had not occurred to him till now. What a story he had stumbled into!—the sequel to one of the most interesting mysteries that he had ever undertaken to solve! Leading the pony by the bridle, he walked quickly forward and caught up with Amy on the trail. She started as he spoke to her by name.

"You had known this man, Tevelin, before?" he began.

She turned to him. "Oh, please don't ask me about it now. I have been through rather a dreadful night; I'd rather not talk."

"I beg your pardon." Mr. McKnight fell back; but Amy spoke quickly to him.

"I want to speak with you," she said; "but not now. Come and see me; you can do something for me, if you will."

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“When may I come?”

“This afternoon. I can’t tell you before all these people. You say you were at Brimfield. Do you know who I am?”

Mr. McKnight nodded. “Yes, I know.”

“Don’t fail to come and see me—at four o’clock—I will expect you. Don’t fail me, will you?”

It was the clerk from Moody’s store who sat in the buggy seat. He appeared quite overcome when the reporter helped Mrs. Bellwood up beside him.

Soon the cavalcade was moving down the valley, Peter bearing the good news some miles ahead.

The small gilt traveling clock, looking out of place on the rough stone mantel, tinkled four. Amy looked up from where she was writing and glanced out of the window. She had rested most of the morning. Her mother, who had passed a sleepless night, was still in bed. The children were playing somewhere back on the hill. Steps sounded on the veranda; Ellen came into the sitting room and announced that there was a gentleman outside who wished to see her.

The apparition that had greeted the rescue party at the doorway of the hut had rather astonished Mr. McKnight; but he was again astonished when he saw her emerge from the house to the veranda, not because of the change in her appearance, but because she still carried in both hands the old tattered notebook that had attracted his curiosity in the morning.

There came to the reporter’s mind the words of the district attorney’s summing up. Here he was, face to face with the missing motive! He had pictured a different sort of person from this girlish-looking woman.

## THE DEVIIOUS WAYS

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But despite her youthfulness and startling beauty, his educated eye read the strength and determination in her clear, pale face; and her voice, as she greeted him, was like soft music under sure control.

She motioned to a seat in one rough armchair, and sat down herself in another, opposite. She came directly at the subject without any confusion or preamble.

“You were at Dr. Lawrence Kellogg’s trial?”

“Yes, Mrs. Bellwood.”

“What do you think—what do people say?”

“Those are different questions! I think it was the most remarkable and dramatic defense I ever listened to. As to what people say—or said, at least—there were two opinions.”

“There should not be. . . . He did not kill my husband.”

Mr. McKnight saw that there was no necessity of drawing out the story.

“Who did, then?” he asked bluntly.

In answer Amy opened the notebook and placed it in his hands. “Patrick Tevelin did! See? He has signed it here with his own name. He struck him with an iron bar as he struggled on the ground with Dr. Kellogg and then ran. He came back afterwards—and hid his body. These are his words—I wrote them down—he signed them.”

The reporter sat there mute in astonishment. How the whole court-room scene came back! The halting testimony of the Irishman on the stand, that dramatic letter, so cleverly worked into the prosecution’s case; the very words recurred to him—how Lawrence Kellogg had written about trying to break that hold upon his

## THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE

throat by pushing himself beneath the overhanging slab of stone. Yes, it must have been, then, that Tevelin had struck the blow! It was plain as could be!

"What do you think now?" Amy asked the question directly, taking back the notebook from his hand.

"There's only one thing to think," he said slowly, studying her. "There's an innocent man, at present far away in the Antarctic ice, who should know this."

She grasped him by the arm—the notebook fell fluttering to the floor. "Do you know where Lawrence Kellogg is?" she asked, her voice fading to a whisper, her whole form shaking.

"I do—or think I do. He's on the *Sheerwater*, the vessel sent out by the Southern Exploration Company a year ago from England."

"How do you know?" She had ceased to tremble now; but the words were still whispered.

McKnight, as he looked into the wide gray eyes, read unwritten volumes.

"It came about in a strange way," he said. "A friend of mine, an Englishman, who was a correspondent at the same time I was, in South Africa, accompanied the expedition, that sailed from Portsmouth, England. He left it at Buenos Ayres. I met him on his return. He said a man named Perry Kellogg was the surgeon of the expedition. He had some photographs that he showed me, taken on the voyage, and I recognized at once the defendant in—in the trial I'd seen at Brimfield."

"Where is this expedition now?"

"Let's see—it's midwinter down there! In the ice, most probably. They were to return to England this

## THE DEVIIOUS WAYS

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December, or January of next year, if I'm not mistaken."

"How could that be ascertained? Would they come back to Portsmouth?"

"Yes, I should think so. That's where the vessel fitted out. . . . But now, Mrs. Bellwood, may I ask you something?"

"What is it?" Her voice was almost as far away as the gaze in her eyes that looked out at the mountain peaks.

"I'm a newspaper man. News is news, and a story is a story. You know, stranger coincidences occur in life than one would dare to put in fiction. This is one; it seems as if it were like the sudden focusing of wandering life lights on one point, the drawing together of threads that have become confused and entangled. May I use this"—he hesitated for an instant—"I don't mean to ask you for it all," he continued, "but just this"—he pointed to the notebook at her feet. "I will not mention your name—and when I say that, I truly mean it. But just let me use this confession."

"I was going to ask you to," was the rejoinder. "If you like, you may use my name."

The reporter shook his head. "No—that is another story; that hasn't been written yet; but"—he looked boldly into her eyes—"it may be, some day. You can trust me to wait for it."

He rose. He had caught a quiver of the beautiful lips that were trying so hard to be bravely still. He saw the gray eyes were brimming full. Now and then there comes to people—even strangers—the rare moment when the sympathetic, unspoken sentence is un-





## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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derstood. He saw she must be alone—that she dared not trust her voice to speak to him.

“ Well, I must be off,” he said. “ I’ll drop in again, if I may, and bring you what I’ve written. I remember all the words—no need of my copying them. Hello! there’s my pony trying to get into your garden.” . . . He dashed down the veranda steps.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE SIGHTED COAST

**D**IPPING her battered bows into the heavy seas that swept westward across the Bay of Biscay, a stanch little steam barkentine swayed northward. Ruddy-faced men were on her decks. Any moment now they might make the looked-for, loved, longed-for home! Two years in the ice makes men keen for it. From aloft, the lookout hailed the bridge. In the setting sun he had seen the gleam of the white coast. The captain turned to the navigator and smiled. "We'll be in Portsmouth Inlet before twelve to-night," he said; "and to-morrow, ho! for the wife and babies, and a long stay ashore!"

He went down the ladder into the after cabin. As he passed by the open door of one of the staterooms, he shouted in: "Land-ho! doctor—Portsmouth straight ahead—fresh beef, my boy, and Southdown mutton!" He did not wait for a reply, but slammed into his own cabin and began roaring a song at top voice.

Lawrence Kellogg put on his greatcoat and went on deck. All this joyousness and gayety bore on him cruelly. These men were returning to homes, wives, sweethearts, looking forward to warm greetings and happy meetings; and he was to land alone, not knowing which way to turn, for he had made no plans. What

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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had happened while he had been away, cut off from all communication with the world? Where was Amy Bellwood? Where was the dear old judge?—and Walter Smith? What of him? what of them all! He had closed the gates behind him. There was not one of his shipmates who did not take him for an Englishman. Not one of them who knew that he was the unknown contributor whose money had helped to set the expedition on its way. No one knew but Sir George Gilford, its prime mover and chief backer—and he was pledged to silence. It was through him he had secured the appointment as surgeon to the *Sheerwater*. Sir George had regarded Kellogg as an enthusiast, the same as he was himself, and, like the others, thought he was a Cornishman.

As he paced the deck, the hours flew; soon he could see the sprinkling lights of the coast gleaming into the clear evening.

By twelve o'clock the *Sheerwater* had rounded the point of Portsea Island and dropped her anchor in home waters. There were many toasts and much singing at the cabin table before all hands turned in. Early the next morning the vessel was warped up to her dock.

“Haven't you set foot on the tight little island yet, doctor?” A voice was bawling down the transom, as he was packing his things. He had made up his mind now! He would go to London and stop at his bankers'. He wondered at himself for having severed every cord to the past in the way he had. It was not right for him to have dropped so completely out of the ken of those who might have cared to follow him. It had been unkind to the judge, at least, after all he had done. He

## *THE SIGHTED COAST*

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would try to make amends in some way. He had thought the matter out and viewed life with saner eyes than he had when, bitter and broken in spirit, he had tossed his own past, heavily weighted, overboard into the wake of aimless wandering. Had he been just, in his selfish and fruitless effort to forget? Had she been able to? Did she thank him for abiding by the inexorable law he had written for himself? She must understand; he knew that well. But did she feel grateful to him, or did she—? He would not dwell on this! Often, before, he had fought the unfinished question, and each time it died the harder. He fought it now—in his loneliness. By that law he had made he would abide. But—"Too late! Too late!"—would he ever cry those bitter words in his defeat?

He glanced about the little stateroom; it seemed filled with these torturing thoughts; the walls pressed tightly on him. He stepped out and closed the lattice door. For the first time the near-by land was tempting: even in the cabin he could hear the roar of the city's breathing—distraction waited there.

When he came up on deck, he found that the other officers had departed. He had almost forgotten that he had said "good-by" to all those whose duties had not necessitated their standing by the ship. The lieutenant who had hailed him was the last one left. Few of the crew were about; they had no cargo to unload, and the liberty they longed for had been granted.

The old quartermaster at the head of the gangway touched his cap and then shook his hand. "You're off, sir? All I can say is, I hope that I'll be shipmates with you again, sir."

"Perhaps so, Mullins. Oh, by the way, I'll send a

## ***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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man for my big box later. Perhaps I'll be back myself."

Lieutenant Featherstone saw him over the side with a hearty, envious farewell.

For the first time in many long months his feet felt firm ground beneath them. He turned from the guarded dock gates into the street, noisy with the rumbling of heavy drays and wagons.

Directly opposite, a little hotel with clean white window curtains back of the narrow casements and an inviting doorway smiled at him. He started to cross the street, when all at once his hand was firmly grasped. A slender little boy in a dark sailor suit and pea-jacket stood close beside him, looking up and talking. Why did those eyes look so familiar? He bent to listen.

"I've been watching for you," the lad's voice was saying; "they said you'd be coming soon, so I watched here at the gate— She's waiting over there."

"She?—who?"

"Mother. I'm Jack—don't you remember me?"

"She's waiting?"

In that swift instant the fog banks that hid the horizon dispersed. It was home from the wandering! Home from the uncertain seas! Gleaming before him was the sighted coast at last!

"We've been here—oh—ever so long, hoping you'd be here every day!"

The defeat had come! She had not forgotten; but she had overstepped the law that had not been meant for her.

"Jack, Jack!" Lawrence Kellogg swept him close and kissed him; then, with the boy on his shoulder, he swiftly gained the farther side.

## *THE SIGHTED COAST*

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“You can put me down,” the little fellow said, as they stopped before the entrance to the hotel. “Mother’s in there”—he pointed—“in the parlor.”

The door seemed to swing open of itself. He saw her standing, both hands outstretched. There was no cry, no word was spoken. In another moment she was in his arms.

Still unable to speak, he looked down at the face that lay there on his breast.

She was dressed in black, and it seemed to accentuate the slimness of her figure—the clear pallor of her face and the dark lashes, damp against her cheek.

“It’s been so long,” she said. “I’m all alone now—you’ll have to take me, Larry.”

He lowered his head and kissed the pure brow beneath the soft, brown hair—and then her lips—and then the swimming eyes that lifted and looked in his.

## ENVOI

### THE HARBOR

**I**T was spring again. They stood on the top of the wind-swept Cornish cliff, looking down at the water tumbling on the white shingle below. She was standing with her hand upon his shoulder, and pointing with the other down the velvety, grass-grown path by which they had ascended. All about them the heather was in bloom. Running up the path toward them were the two children, their voices gay with excitement.—This was the dream—the dream that had come true!

“Lawrence, dear”—she swung him about to face her, and stood closer to him than she had before—“do you remember something I once said?”

He smiled. “I remember everything you ever said.”

“But one particular thing.”

“I remember all the particular things. But what was it?”

“I’ll whisper it.”

He clasped her gently. Now he remembered—but, oh!—the sweetness of those words—pathetic no longer, but glorious in their hope and prophecy! Oh! that day when she had said: “I should like to see your child, Lawrence!”

The eyes of both were moist. The children were

## THE HARBOR

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near them now—little Jack ahead, and the golden-haired girl panting after him.

“Ours, too!” she said, turning.

Her husband understood.

“Always ours—always the same.”

The boy stood opposite them, diving into the breast of his sailor blouse.

“The postman left a letter. . . . Why, you look as if you had been crying. Why were you crying, Marsie?”

His mother smiled at him. “Look now!” she said.

“Then I know what it is,” the boy continued; “it’s the wind. It’s that way when I run.”

“Where’s that letter, young man?”

He found it at last and handed it to Lawrence, then leaned against him, his arms clasped round his thigh.

“It’s from Judge Hollins,” Lawrence said, his hand falling to the boy’s shoulder. He read a minute, then handed it to Amy. “There’s news,” he laughed.

She read the first three lines and then looked for a moment far across the dancing channel and smiled back at him.

“People here,” began the letter, “are wondering if you two are ever coming back—warm greetings wait you. Walter Smith just called me up from Antioch. I think he’s crazy! He wishes me to be his best man at his wedding to Miss Bromley. What do you think? And I’ve accepted.” Then, as if ashamed of himself, the old lawyer plunged into business.

As they walked back toward the low, slate-roofed dwelling, sheltered in its hollow, with the trees about it, Amy spoke thoughtfully:





***THE CLUTCH OF CIRCUMSTANCE***

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“I don’t think I’d care to go back to Brimfield.”

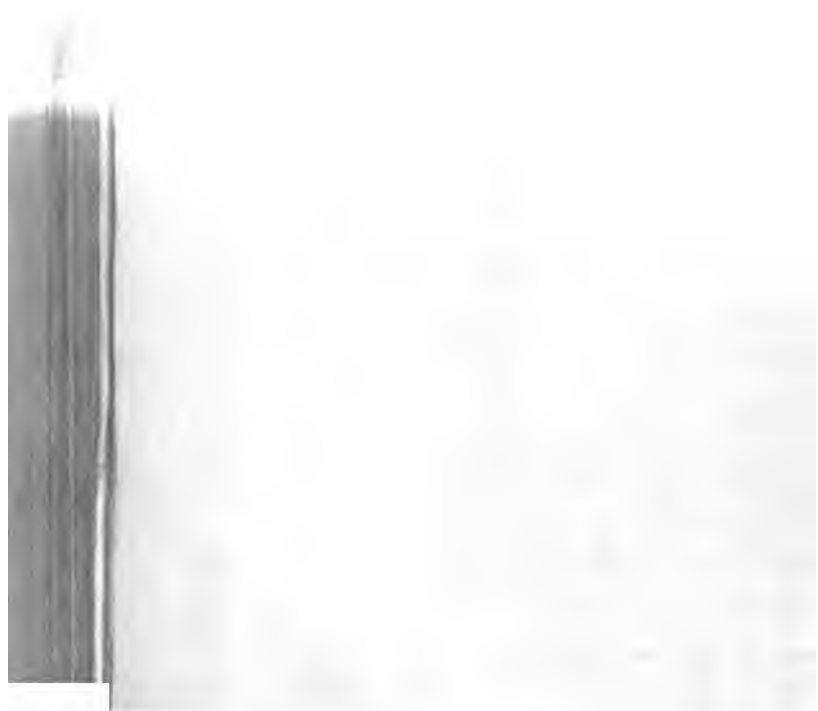
“Nor I, darling—not yet a while.”

“Not yet a while.” And the ever-reaching hand found his and rested there.

(1)

**THE END**





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